

To what extent do states have a responsibility to ensure that all citizens in the world have access to a coronavirus vaccine?

Over 49.9 million people have tested positive for coronavirus, with a global death toll of 1.3 million people (BBC, 2020). Some of the largest economies have faced historically high contractions in GDP, as supply chains have been impacted by workers having to self-isolate and a lack of international trade, and demand has fallen due to lockdowns and social-distancing (Telegraph Video, 2020). The production of a vaccine seems hopeful, although it is almost certain that demand will greatly exceed supply. This issue of distribution could determine how effective the vaccine is in preventing further transmission and how quickly the global economy is able to recover.

The pandemic has greatly emphasised the vast inequality within countries. Generally, lower paid employment cannot be replicated from home, whereas those on higher salaries can avoid the workplace. Moreover, many of those with lower-skilled jobs have either been made redundant, shown by the increase in the UK unemployment rate to 4.8%, or furloughed (The ONS, 2020). The fair distribution of a vaccination amongst all income levels will boost employers' confidence levels, allowing more people to return to work. In the long term, equitable allocation of the vaccine, leading to fewer social-distancing regulations, will enable the economy to recover, permitting companies to hire more workers.

Although the allocation of vaccinations within countries remains a pertinent concern, perhaps the most important issue regarding access to a vaccine is the equal distribution in wealthy and developing nations. Countries like Brazil and Mexico have experienced some of the highest coronavirus death rates per capita (Statista, 2020). One issue facing these countries is the cost of transportation and storage. The 'cold-chain' ensures vaccinations are safe and effective to use, though it can cost up to 80% of the total expenditure on vaccines (Ansaldi, et al., 2011). Rich nations must contribute to these costs, as with insufficient financial support, countries hit hardest by the pandemic will struggle to store and distribute vaccines to all citizens.

Globalisation has undoubtedly contributed greatly to the spread of coronavirus. Bill Gates, who is financially supporting companies researching vaccines, suggests that remnants of the virus in some countries will return to others, potentially causing spikes in cases (The Economist, 2020). By over-purchasing large quantities of vaccine, wealthy nations can prevent other countries from accessing the life-saving prophylactic treatment, as was the case in 2009 with the influenza vaccine (Devex, 2020). This nationalistic approach will cause an unequal distribution, and it is likely that pockets of COVID-19 will remain intact. A study conducted by MOBS LAB discovered that 33% of deaths would be prevented if two-thirds of the vaccine supply was purchased by the wealthiest countries, compared to the prevention of 61% of deaths if vaccines were distributed to all countries, proportional to their populations (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2020). One cause for this could be the trade-off lower-skilled employees have faced between being protected from the virus or working; many being forced to choose the latter. Mutations are also more likely if the vaccine is not equally distributed globally (Nuki, 2020). Moreover, with the recent surge in the 'anti-vaxxer' movement, it could be difficult to predict how many people in wealthy nations will in fact consent to the vaccine, and so these countries will remain at risk. Therefore, vaccine allocation affects even 'protected' countries, as well as individuals' livelihoods, which wealthy nations must recognise.

Vaccine multilateralism is a potential solution to the problem of vaccine administration. It involves the cooperation of wealthy countries to aid said distribution around the world; an idea endorsed by Dr Richard Hatchett (CNN, 2020). Richer states have a responsibility to ensure countries unable to afford vaccine costs can still distribute it amongst their civilians, and must not wholly absorb its

supply. Similarly, Tedros Adhanom (The Economist, 2020) has endorsed COVAX and the ACT accelerator, which are programmes designed to ensure the worldwide distribution of the vaccine is co-ordinated fairly. Such schemes are vital for developing nations, as they promote the collaboration between those who can afford the treatment and those who require financial aid.

To achieve a successful and worldwide recovery from the pandemic, nations must cooperate to provide all citizens with access to vaccinations. This will ensure the global economy experiences a more rapid recovery and will prevent this tragic epidemic from taking more lives, either due to the virus itself or losses in livelihoods. Unfortunately, already over 140 million doses of the newly produced vaccine by Pfizer have been reserved by the USA and UK, despite the company only being able to produce 50 million doses this year (Nuki, 2020). As more treatments are developed, this response to vaccines must be avoided to prevent the prolonging of the epidemic. The spread of coronavirus has caused a worldwide pandemic; it will require worldwide collaboration to bring an end to it.

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