

Universal vaccination the only way to end pandemic



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Vaccine scarcity: A sign displayed at a hospital in New Delhi early this month shows the need for concerted efforts in vaccine production globally. – AFP

COVID-19 is a global problem that requires a concerted effort to end. And experts have pointed out that this will not be possible unless people in every country are vaccinated.

As stated by World Health Organisation (WHO) director-general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, "Vaccines will help us end the Covid-19

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On Wednesday, UN secretary-general Antonio Guterres waded in, saying it is “in the interest of everybody that everybody is vaccinated everywhere.”

This means that people in every country, whether developed, developing, or least developed, should be vaccinated. Sadly, this is yet to happen.

Guterres also pointed out that “it is totally unacceptable to live in the world, in which developed countries can vaccinate most of their population while many developing countries have no access to one single dose.”

Vaccinating people in every country in times of vaccine scarcity is difficult but certainly not impossible. It requires concerted multinational efforts to double the world’s capacity of production while having a more equitable distribution system.

The time for “business as usual” is over. The relevant institutions must do unusual things, otherwise the dangers of coronavirus mutation and the new variants may spread like wildfire in different parts of the developing world.

The fact that many countries are facing vaccine shortages, and a worsening of the second wave of infections, especially in India, suggest that further efforts are needed to produce adequate, safe and affordable vaccines.

We need to immunise everyone everywhere in order to eradicate the virus from all corners of the world. This is necessary because if any trace is left of the virus in any part of the world, it could spread again, possibly with new and more deadly variants, just as it did from Wuhan, China.

A recent study by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) shows that it is “only by working together, across borders, that we’ll be able to solve the problems (of vaccine scarcity and equitable access).”

To ramp up production of Covid-19 vaccines, WTO member States should remove trade-related obstacles to allow sharing of technology and know-how with developing and least developed countries. By doing so, pharmaceutical companies in these countries can participate in vaccine production.

WTO member countries can do this by invoking a waiver of certain intellectual property rights, including “copyright, industrial designs, patents and undisclosed information under the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).”

This is possible if WTO member countries, particularly the wealthy ones, have the necessary political will.

It is essential that medical technology necessary for the production of Covid-19 vaccines is within the reach of every country, that vaccination

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This is the only way to end the pandemic, revive economies, enable travelling, rejuvenate the tourism and hospitality industry, and make life as joyful as it was in the pre-Covid-19 era, or even better.

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TAGS / KEYWORDS:

Covid-1; Vaccines; Trade-Related Obstacles

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