

Global biopharmaceutical industry sees upcoming World Health Assembly as a critical milestone to take stock of progress achieved and discuss enablers for future pandemic preparedness

24 May 2021, Geneva – The 74th [World Health Assembly](#), taking place in extraordinary circumstances, represents a critical milestone in analyzing the world’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Member States will engage in conversations on improving current systems for pandemic surveillance and response, against the backdrop of having multiple effective, safe and quality COVID-19 vaccines available.

Since the last World Health Assembly, innovative vaccine manufacturers and biotech companies – from both developed and developing countries – have broken records in drug innovation and collaboration. In a matter of months, they have developed multiple COVID-19 vaccines, and have forged collaborations in order to ramp up production.

With nearly 300 partnerships and collaborations among manufacturers worldwide, production has increased, in just a few months from zero to 2.2 billion COVID-19 vaccine doses by the end of May, with an astounding estimate of 11 billion doses by the end of 2021¹.

Critically, however, COVID-19 vaccines currently are not equally reaching all priority populations worldwide. Innovative vaccine manufacturers and biotech companies [committed last week to a five-step plan](#) that will deliver results in the short-term.

“Despite a massive effort to scale up and produce billions of vaccine doses, COVID-19 vaccines are not equally reaching all priority populations worldwide. We believe that action is needed now. Manufacturers, governments, and non-governmental organizations must work together to take urgent steps to further address this inequity. Immediate action must focus on stepping up responsible dose sharing and maximizing production without compromising quality or safety, eliminating all trade and regulatory barriers to export. This goes hand in hand with facilitating the cross-border supply of key raw materials and essential manufacturing materials, and prioritizing the movement of skilled vaccine manufacturing workforce” said Thomas Cueni, Director General, IFPMA. He added: *“The biopharmaceutical industry is walking the talk: at the G20 Global Health Summit, in addition to commitments already made, COVID-19 vaccine makers pledged 3.5 billion vaccine doses at cost or discount to low- and middle-income countries this year and next”*.

The pandemic has underscored the importance of sharing of pathogens and their genetic sequence, for instance, through platforms such as GISAID². The unprecedented speed in developing new vaccines and medical countermeasures against COVID-19 has only been possible due to the sequence of SARS-CoV-2 being made available in an extremely fast fashion and to everyone who wished to perform research and to track the evolution of viral variants. Only through timely and comprehensive pathogen sharing can we ensure that vaccines and medicines are well-matched to circulating strains or variants, have the highest possible effectiveness, and are rapidly manufactured and supplied. *“As we have learned from COVID-19, pathogens know no borders. To fight infectious diseases we need to ensure cooperation and universal commitment to an open-source data and pathogen sharing system. The evolution of the virus is a stark reminder*

¹ Airfinity Data, 19 May: https://www.ifpma.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/airfinity_production_19.05.2021.pdf

² More than 1.2 million coronavirus genome sequences from 172 countries and territories have now been shared on the GISAID platform.



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that continued innovation is key. Biopharmaceutical companies are working on booster shots to tackle the threat of emerging variants”, said Thomas Cueni.

COVID-19 has focused minds on being ready for the next pandemic. Industry has been engaged in pandemic preparedness, particularly for influenza and antimicrobial resistance, and therefore appreciates the complexities of making sure that discussions on pandemic preparedness reflect the need to cover this ground and further incentivise and harness medical innovation to ensure we are better equipped to fight future pandemics.

Looking to the short term, it will be key that the fruits of innovation reach people who need them – in particular COVID-19 vaccines. It is imperative that industry can continue to deliver on the science as it has done so far.

About IFPMA

IFPMA represents the research-based pharmaceutical companies and associations across the globe. The research-based pharmaceutical industry’s 2 million employees discover, develop, and deliver medicines and vaccines that improve the life of patients worldwide. Based in Geneva, IFPMA has official relations with the United Nations and contributes industry expertise to help the global health community find solutions that improve global health.

For further information, please contact

Abigail Jones

a.jones@ifpma.org

+32 475 41 09 76

Morgane De Pol

m.depol@ifpma.org