

Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport
Attn Minister De Jonge, Minister Kaag, Minister Hoekstra, Minister Van 't Wout
P.O. Box 20350
2500 EJ The Hague

Amsterdam, February 2, 2021

Subject: Solution for shortages Covid-19 vaccines

Knowledge sharing necessary for the availability of vaccines for ending the pandemic

Globally, governments and companies are working hard to end the Covid-19 pandemic. Now that pharmaceutical companies have developed the first effective vaccines, governments must overcome the next hurdle: making the vaccines available. Recently, in Europe, we have experienced problems with the supply of both the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine. Lack of access to vaccines has been a problem for low- and middle-income countries for a long time. The major underlying cause - the limited production capacity of vaccine developers – has made it impossible for them to supply the entire world with these vaccines in the short term. The current supply problem painfully illustrates that we are completely dependent on just a few producers.

There is a solution to this problem. But it has not yet been exploited.

This solution is to share knowledge and patents for vaccine production in the Covid-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) of the World Health Organization (WHO). The Netherlands officially supported C-TAP in 2020.¹ Unfortunately, the government has not yet translated this commitment into any concrete actions. That is why we call on the government to provide financial assistance to C-TAP, and to actively engage with pharmaceutical companies to encourage them to share their knowledge and patents. This way, the Netherlands can live up to its reputation and pioneering role in access to medicines. With this commitment, the government will ensure that C-TAP becomes a success, the global vaccine production capacity is maximized, and the pandemic ends as soon as possible.

C-TAP contributes to lower prices and greater global production capacity

The WHO established C-TAP in 2020 to remove barriers to intellectual property and knowledge of manufacturing process, to increase access to Covid-19 technologies (medicines, vaccines and diagnostics). Like the successful Medicines Patent Pool (MPP), C-TAP is a place where inventors of Covid-19 vaccines can share their patents, knowledge and (technological) know-how with other pharmaceutical companies. In the past, the MPP has played a key role in increasing the accessibility and affordability of medicines during the HIV and AIDS epidemic. Until today, the MPP has contributed to the accessibility of a large number of medicines.

By sharing knowledge about production and patents, manufacturers enable other pharmaceutical companies to contribute to the global production capacity. Eighteen generic drug manufacturers have

¹ <https://www.wemos.nl/en/the-netherlands-supports-a-global-covid-19-pool/>

already pledged to help produce pharmaceutical products against Covid-19.² In low- and middle-income countries, 43 vaccine manufacturers can potentially support production, some of which have only now been licensed.³ Simply put, C-TAP can be used to deploy more factories to produce Covid-19 vaccines, enabling them to be distributed more quickly around the world and end the pandemic faster. In addition, increased production capacity has a favourable effect on the price, making the vaccines more affordable. Fairly priced vaccines are essential, especially since governments have contributed significantly to the development of the vaccines through tax money. That is why the WHO has urged all companies developing Covid-19 vaccines to share their patents and knowledge in C-TAP.⁴ However, to date, no pharmaceutical company has complied with this request.

C-TAP is indispensable for COVAX

The Dutch government has expressed support for COVAX and financially contributes to this initiative for the worldwide distribution of vaccines, thus trying to take international responsibility in resolving the pandemic. But these efforts are in fact insufficient. To enable a fair global distribution, a structural solution is needed that goes further than the donation of vaccines. COVAX could operate at a much higher speed if C-TAP were fully operational, as this would increase the production capacity of pharmaceutical companies. And the production capacity of all companies that have developed a Covid-19 vaccine combined does not come close to the required capacity. It is therefore imperative that other companies step in to produce vaccines. If we want a powerful and effective COVAX, we will have to ensure that manufacturers share their patents and knowledge in C-TAP.

C-TAP prevents greater economic damage

RAND Europe recently published the results of their research into the costs associated with adhering to so-called vaccine nationalism, in which rich countries mainly buy vaccines for themselves. The research shows that it costs a one-off USD 25 billion to provide lower-income countries with vaccines. If lower-income countries are not supported and certain regions remain excluded from vaccination, it will cost wealthier countries USD 119 billion a year. This brings a cost-benefit ratio of 4.8 to 1: for every dollar spent, rich countries would save USD 4.80. If we, as the Netherlands, do not contribute to a structural solution for the worldwide distribution of Covid-19 vaccines, Dutch citizens will also suffer the long-term economic consequences.

C-TAP reduces the risk of new mutations

Another reason to improve the global accessibility of Covid-19 vaccines as soon as possible, is to minimise the risks of mutations. When mutations occur, there is a chance that the effectiveness of a vaccine decreases or that the course of the disease becomes more severe. When a larger group of people is vaccinated, the chance of mutations is smaller. It is therefore in the interest of all of us to maximise vaccine accessibility. The pandemic will *not* be over until there is sufficient access to a vaccine everywhere.

² <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/global-research-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/covid-19-technology-access-pool>

³ <https://www.dcvmn.org/-About->

⁴ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/global-research-on-novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov/covid-19-technology-access-pool/solidarity-call-to-action>

C-TAP makes us less vulnerable to production problems

The shortfall in deliveries from Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca have been widely reported in the media. This also affects the Netherlands. C-TAP offers a solution for current capacity problems, but also for potential problems in the future. The larger the number of producers making the vaccine, the less vulnerable we are to production problems.

Recommendations for the Dutch government

As we mentioned earlier in this letter, the Dutch government is already an official 'co-sponsor' of C-TAP. Unfortunately, it will take more than expressing support to make C-TAP a success. To ensure its success, making an essential contribution to the end of the pandemic, we recommend the following to the Dutch government:

- Provide substantive and earmarked financial support to the World Health Organization (WHO) so that C-TAP can effectively contribute to increasing the global production of medical technologies against Covid-19.
- Together with other EU member states, start a dialogue with pharmaceutical companies to get them to actively share their patents and knowledge in C-TAP.
- As a member of the 'EU Joint Negotiating Team', require future manufacturers of pharmaceuticals against Covid-19 to actively share their patents and knowledge in C-TAP.
- Start a dialogue with EU member states and the European Commission so that they also express their official support for C-TAP and put pressure on pharmaceutical companies to actively contribute to C-TAP.

We hope that we can count on your support to promote access to Covid-19 vaccines and thus fight the pandemic. We are open to any questions and, if necessary, we are happy to provide further verbal explanations on our letter.

Yours sincerely,

Wemos & Oxfam Novib

Co-signed by:

ActionAid NL
Akvo
Amref Flying Doctors
Artsen zonder Grenzen
CARE Nederland
CHOICE
CNV Internationaal
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