# COVID Vaccines Gain Traction as Developing World Eyes India for Doses

By: Gerelyn Terzo

It's been almost a year since coronavirus was first identified in Wuhan, China. Since then the global economy nearly came to a stop as countries rushed to ban travel and implement lockdown measures. With 2020 almost in the rear-view mirror, and the threat of a second wave of the pandemic emerging, a cure could not have come too soon. Now clinical trials of a COVID-19 vaccine are entering the final stages and showing promising results, giving hope to the global population for a cure.

The United States and Europe have taken the lead for vaccine development, with companies such as Moderna and Pfizer as well as AstraZeneca and Oxford scientists out front. Moderna and Pfizer have disclosed their trial results boasting effective rates of 94.5% and 90%, respectively, which suggests that they will be successful. And while there is a great deal of optimism surrounding these vaccines, supplies are expected to be limited, placing lower-income countries who are the most vulnerable to another coronavirus wave at risk of being at the back of the line.

And it is not just the supply of the vaccine that is at issue. Pfizer's version of the vaccine must be kept at extremely frigid temperatures of around minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit. As a result, demand for ultra low-temperature freezers has soared, making the preservation of the virus more challenging. Moderna's version of the vaccine is initially in a frozen state but it can be thawed and preserved in a conventional refrigerator for up to a month, which provides greater flexibility.

In past research, the World Health Organization has warned that "higher vaccine wastage is expected with freeze-dried vaccines since they must be discarded within six hours of opening, whereas liquid vaccines can be used in subsequent sessions for up to four weeks." The WHO is responsible for buying doses of the vaccine for populations in developing countries, but they still have questions surrounding the longevity of the immunization and if it works on people of all ages. On that note, the University of Oxford with AstraZeneca have experienced positive results with their vaccine candidate with the immune response in older adults including the eldery.

Fortunately, there is a large amount of money that has been earmarked to support high-risk populations. For instance, the World Bank has announced that it has given the green light to $12 billion in funding for COVID-19 vaccines with a focus on developing nations. The funds are meant to be directed toward financing "the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments for their citizens."

The funds, which are part of a larger $160 billion financing package that the World Bank has dedicated to fighting the pandemic, are expected to help as many as 1 billion people gain access to vaccines. The program is a reminder to the global pharmaceutical industry that the populations of low-income countries are also in need of access to these vaccines and immunity from the disease. The funds will also support the logistical process for distributing the vaccines at scale including working with international partners. World Bank Group President David Malpass said in a statement,

"We are extending and expanding our fast-track approach to address the COVID emergency so that developing countries have fair and equal access to vaccines. Access to safe and effective vaccines and strengthened delivery systems is key to alter the course of the pandemic and help countries experiencing catastrophic economic and fiscal impacts move toward a resilient recovery."

The World Bank is supporting the efforts of the WHO and COVAX, the latter of which is a collaborative effort of more than 150 countries to collaborate for fair access to the vaccines.

## Supply Strain

While confidence is high about the COVID vaccines eradicating the virus, there is also a growing fear that lower income nations will be left out in the cold. CNBC interviewed Suerie Moon, co-director of the Global Health Centre at the Graduate of Institute of Geneva, about the fair distribution of the vaccine. Moon described a "rule of the jungle situation" in which countries with the greatest resources across Europe, North America and Japan are securing a greater volume of the vaccines vs. other jurisdictions.

She refers to the COVAX initiative, in which the member countries have agreed to "share vaccine supply," though that supply is limited. Meanwhile, higher-income countries are able to also secure vaccines through other channels, placing them at an advantage.

## All Eyes on India

Rather than depend on the developed world for access to a vaccine, some countries are taking matters into their own hands. India, whose capital New Delhi has been reeling from a second wave of the pandemic in recent days, is among them and is depended upon to play a key role in the distribution of a vaccine to developing countries.

According to The Washington Post, despite efforts toward the fair distribution of the COVID vaccine, the developing world has only managed to get their hands on 700 million doses compared to countries such as the United States, Japan, and Canada, which have access to enough doses to immunize their entire populations. India alone has a population of 1.3 billion people.

Indian billionaire Adar Poonawalla has scoffed at the vaccines that require ultra-cold storage, saying that they are not the solution for the developing world. Poonawalla warns that the global population will not reach full immunization until 2024 despite reports to the contrary.

**Adar Poonawalla** @adarpoonawalla · Sep 26

Quick question; will the government of India have 80,000 crores available, over the next one year? Because that's what @MoHFW_INDIA needs, to buy and distribute the vaccine to everyone in India. This is the next concerning challenge we need to tackle. @PMOIndia

3.9K 10K 38.6K

**Adar Poonawalla**
@adarpoonawalla

Replying to @adarpoonawalla

I ask this question, because we need to plan and guide, vaccine manufacturers both in India and overseas to service the needs of our country in terms of procurement and distribution.

6:38 AM · Sep 26, 2020 · Twitter for Android

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Source: Twitter

Poonawalla is willing to put his money where his mouth is and has committed $250 million of his wealth through his company, Serum Institute of India, to bolster the global manufacturing capacity to 1 billion doses through the end of next year. According to The New York Times, Serum is preparing to produce 500 doses of the vaccine every minute. Poonawalla is reportedly willing to share half of his company's vaccine production with the rest of the world while keeping the other half for India.

India, meanwhile, has experience on its side. According to Andrea Taylor, assistant director at the Duke Global Health Innovation Center, as the world's biggest vaccine maker, India has been a "vaccine powerhouse" even prior to COVID. It already has the capacity to produce more than 1.5 billion vaccine doses annually, the lion's share of which are directed to poor countries. As a result, it has the infrastructure in place to deliver exports to low and middle-income nations at a manageable cost.

Serum Institute will be out front and is poised to make more than 66% of the 3 billion doses earmarked for low and middle-income countries, an effort that extends to Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca and Novavax.

A COVID vaccine dedicated to the developing world can't come soon enough, with a surge in COVID cases across the United States and Europe triggering a new wave of global restrictions. Low-income countries are already grappling with shrinking remittance flows as a result of the lockdown measures, while money transfer providers like Sharemoney and Xoom stand ready to serve the developing world.

*Gerelyn Terzo is a staff writer at Sharemoney, a money remittance service that is passionate about improving the lives of immigrants. The granddaughter of an Italian immigrant from the town of Teora whose first steps in the U.S. were on Ellis Island, Gerelyn resides in New Jersey.*