



Universal access to Covid-19 vaccine is possible if governments agree to WTO waiver

Statement by Public Services International

Workers who have been delivering vital public services throughout the pandemic call on members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to support the proposal of India, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique and Eswatini, for a "[Waiver from certain provisions of the TRIPS Agreement for the prevention, containment and treatment of COVID-19](#)".

Intellectual property (IP) rules put in place to protect the profits of pharmaceutical companies are a threat to global public health and will make economic recovery impossible for developing countries in particular.

The pandemic has demanded extraordinary sacrifices from workers around the world. In some countries, health care workers have worked in dangerous conditions, often without appropriate PPE, extended hours and often with little or no time off. Thousands of health care workers have died. Hundreds of millions of workers have lost their jobs and livelihoods. Pharmaceutical companies should not be allowed to profit from the pandemic by enforcing monopoly power while everyone else has made efforts and sacrifices to overcome the crisis.

A global recovery will require every country to have access to all information, research and medical products needed to treat the virus and prevent its spread. If critical information is kept secret in the interests of profits or "vaccine nationalism", millions of people will be unnecessarily infected.

Health workers, scientists, public sector researchers and patients have routinely shared the information they gather on the virus, confident that sharing information will contribute to public health. Much of the information that pharmaceutical companies utilise is drawn from public sector research, public health institutions, public technologies and public sector workers. Many vaccines and treatment for COVID 19 are financed through government support. The rules under the TRIPS Agreement (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) obligate countries to allow big pharma companies to privatise innovation achieved with public funding.

IP rules also allow pharmaceutical companies to prevent other manufacturers from producing COVID-19 vaccines and medicines, impeding scaling up of production. These rules ensure big pharma has a monopoly over the market and can dictate prices even to governments, which will consume public finances required for a healthy recovery.

The Doha Declaration on Public Health reaffirmed the flexibilities contained in the TRIPS agreement to address the public health needs of WTO member states. However, while some member states included TRIPS flexibility in their national laws, many did not. Further, wealthy countries often exert political pressure on developing countries against the use of TRIPS flexibilities.

All governments committed to global public health should demonstrate a commitment to solidarity by supporting the COVID-19-related waiver proposal and making the waiver of TRIPS obligations for least developed countries permanent. To overcome the unprecedented challenge that the COVID-19 pandemic presents, we need all countries and all parts of society to contribute.

Public Services International represents more than 30 million workers, including healthcare workers, aged care workers, water, sanitation and energy workers, emergency service workers, and workers who keep local, provincial and federal government services and administration working. We will work with our affiliates to ensure national governments are aware that health workers and other public services workers expect them to support these WTO proposals.

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