

# Imperialist countries' hoarding vaccine risks prolonging pandemic

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Imperialist countries have pre-ordered enough vaccines to inoculate their populations many times over. As the wealthier nations secure their economic dominance by eradicating the virus and getting back to normal, vaccines will sit stockpiled in the UK, Canada and EU while many more lives are lost in the poorer, semi-colonial countries. This system of distribution not only values short-term economic interests above the lives of billions of people but also increases the likelihood of new Covid strains, any one of which could render the vaccine ineffective.

Canada currently leads in vaccine procurement, having reserved enough to immunise its population 4.1 times over. Next are the UK and Australia, which have both secured three times the number of vaccines they need, closely followed by the EU which has reserved 1.7 times the vaccines required by each of its member states.

Most of the vaccines due to be produced in 2021 have now been pre-ordered by the wealthiest countries. The supplies available for poorer countries are low and most are relying on distribution by COVAX, an organisation led by Gavi, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness (CEPI). COVAX aims to provide 2 billion doses by the end of 2021. These vaccines will only cover 20% of the populations of the 189 countries signed up to COVAX and the cost, timescales and methods of distribution are uncertain. Those most in need of a vaccine are at the back of the queue.

In October, South Africa and India asked the World Trade Organisation to waive intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccines, but this was opposed by the UK, US and EU. This means semi-colonial countries cannot legally import or manufacture generic versions of the vaccine and must rely on those produced by large pharmaceutical companies and distributed by COVAX.

In the meantime, Covid-19 deaths will continue to rise across large parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Anna Marriott, Oxfam's health policy manager, said, "No-one should be blocked from getting a life-saving vaccine because of the country they live in or the amount of money in their pocket. But unless something changes dramatically, billions of people around the world will not receive a safe and effective vaccine for Covid-19 for years to come."

As we have already witnessed in the UK, uncontrolled spread of the virus increases the likelihood of new variants developing. There is growing concern that a new strain discovered in South Africa could be resistant to existing vaccines. If the uncontrolled spread of the virus continues anywhere in the world, there is an ever-present danger of the emergence of a strain of coronavirus which is resistant to one or more of the vaccines, rendering them useless.

To achieve global herd immunity, around 70 per cent of the world's population would need to be

vaccinated. However, the imperialist countries are racing to be Covid-free and better able to shore up their national economies against the global recession, hoping to come out of this ahead of their rivals. This aim is at odds with the need to simultaneously vaccinate people in every country and end the pandemic as quickly as possible.

The number of vaccines procured by COVAX for semi-colonial countries is woefully insufficient and the timescale for distribution is still unknown. Although the imperialist countries will likely sell on or donate their excess doses to poorer countries, the aim of such assistance is the accumulation of 'soft power' by the imperialist countries. They will focus on assisting their own client states, attach conditions to vaccine provision or use it to undermine rival powers. This course of action will slow the global response to the pandemic and cost yet more lives.

It is not in the interests of the working classes of rich, imperialist countries to support their government's nationalist approach to the pandemic. The preservation of national economies is once again being prioritised over public health. We must demand the scrapping of patents and an end to vaccine-hoarding to allow vaccination programmes to begin everywhere.

The wealth of the imperialist countries, made off the backs of the global poor and working class, must be used in an international, coordinated effort to eliminate Covid-19. This would both save lives now and significantly reduce the danger of a new, resistant strain of the virus developing. The ruling classes of the imperialist countries will never willingly take this road and risk endangering their profit margins. Only a concerted campaign of international working class solidarity can force these parasites to put the health of the global human population above the health of their bank balances.

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