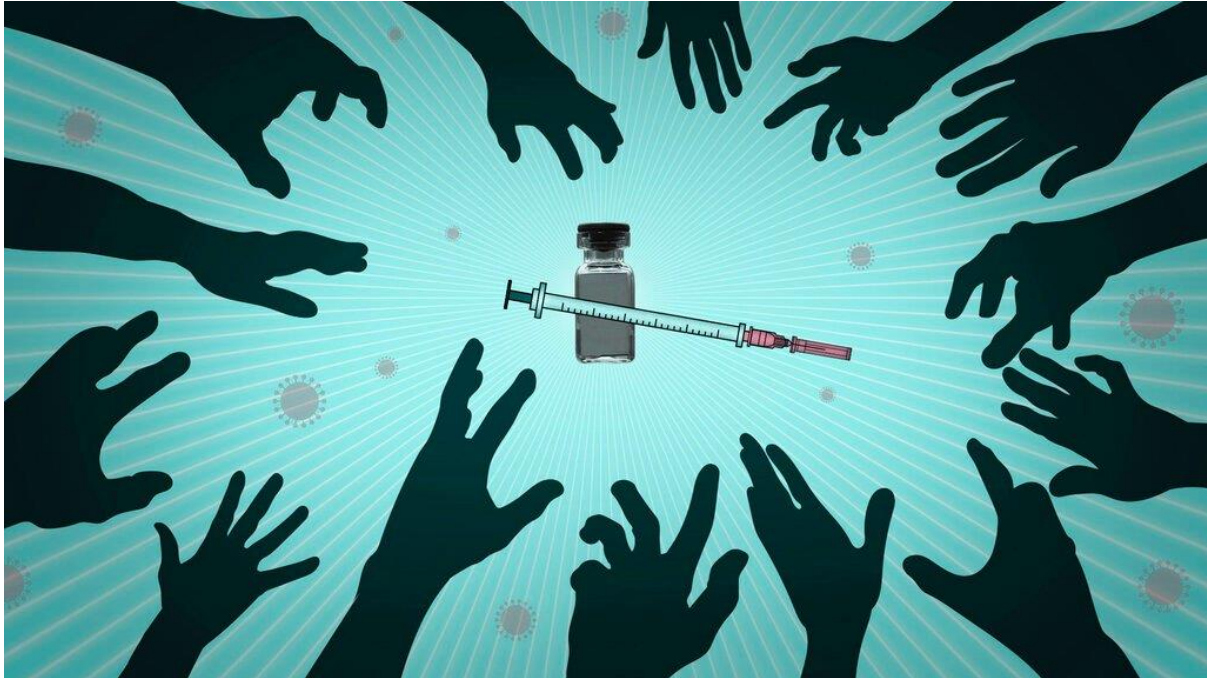


# Poorer nations to get virus vaccine early 2021, says WHO



Poorer countries will begin to receive coronavirus vaccination doses early next year from a facility created to ensure fair access, the World Health Organization (WHO) and its partners said Friday (December 18, 2020).

Almost two billion doses of candidate vaccines have been secured for the Covax facility, run by the WHO along with the Gavi vaccine alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (Cepi).

Countries including the US and Britain have already begun to roll out a vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNtech, with another developed by Moderna expected to gain widespread approval soon.

Neither drug is included in the two billion doses, but the WHO said it was in discussions with both companies.

“The arrangements announced today (December 18, 2020) will enable all participating economies to have access to doses in the first half of 2021, with first deliveries anticipated to begin in the first quarter of 2021,” the WHO, Gavi and Cepi said in a statement.

Shipments of enough vaccines to protect health and social care workers would be delivered “in the first half of 2021 to all participating economies who have requested doses in this timeframe”, the statement said.

It said deliveries were contingent upon regulatory approvals and countries’ readiness for delivery.

**20% target for 2021**

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus told a virtual press conference that “light at the end of the tunnel has grown a little bit brighter”.

“But we will only truly end the pandemic if we end it everywhere at the same time, which means it’s essential to vaccinate some people in all countries, rather than all people in some countries,” he said.

The statement said that by the end of the year, 20% of the populations in participating countries should be covered.

The WHO revealed Friday that it had signed an agreement with US pharmaceutical giant Johnson & Johnson for 500 million doses of a candidate drug, adding to agreements already signed with AstraZeneca, Novavax and Sanofi-GSK.

The UN health agency has previously said it was willing to include vaccines developed in China and Russia should those drugs prove safe and effective.

Cepi chief Richard Hatchett said massive research and development efforts were paying off.

“We now have safe and effective vaccines that can protect against Covid-19 and a clear pathway to securing two billion doses for the populations at greatest risk all around the world,” he said.

Gavi chief Seth Berkley meanwhile hailed the “unprecedented speed and scale” of the project.

“Securing access to doses of a new vaccine for both higher-income and lower-income countries, at roughly the same time and during a pandemic, is a feat the world has never achieved before,” he said.

Covax is a collaboration between organisations, companies and 190 countries – but neither the US nor Russia have joined so far. – **AFP, Geneva, December 19, 2020**