



Draft WHO pandemic deal pushes for equity to avoid COVID 'failure' repeat



FILE PHOTO: A woman receives a booster dose of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine

Jennifer Rigby and Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber

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By Jennifer Rigby and Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber

LONDON/GENEVA (Reuters) -Governments may have to reserve drugs and vaccines for the World Health Organization to distribute in poorer countries to avoid a repeat of the "catastrophic failure" during the COVID-19 pandemic, according to an early draft of a global pandemic agreement.

One of the most concrete proposals in the draft accord reviewed by Reuters on Wednesday includes a measure to reserve 20% of any tests, vaccines or treatments developed for use in poorer countries.

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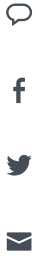
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allow for wider access to life-saving drugs and vaccines more quickly.

The pharmaceutical industry is against the move.

The draft also retains earlier provisions that could see pharmaceutical companies made to release details of any public contracts for vaccines and treatments during such global health emergencies.

The agreement, which is commonly known as the pandemic treaty, has been drawn up by WHO member states and will now go through a lengthy negotiating process before being finalised.

Talks on the draft treaty will begin on Feb. 27 and are set to continue to 2024. Member states have agreed that the treaty will be legally binding for those who sign up, but it is not yet clear how that will be enforced.

The draft was released to member states and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) on Wednesday. It contains a number of measures to ensure the world's response to the next pandemic is not only more robust, but more equitable.

"It is a once-in-a-generation chance to make a paradigm shift in the protection and improvement of the health of the world's people," WHO spokesperson Fadela Chaib said of the accord.

The draft begins by saying it is being drawn up "in recognition of the catastrophic failure of the international community in showing solidarity and equity in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic".

However, there will be "heat and opposition" in the negotiations ahead, particularly around the intellectual property provisions, said James Love, director of the NGO Knowledge Ecology International.

"The 'accord' should build on the private sector's strengths for innovative R&D, quick manufacturing scaling up and distribution, which is built on a robust intellectual property system," said Thomas Cueni, director general of the International Federation of Pharmaceutical Manufacturers and Associations.



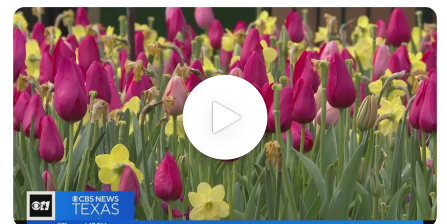
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compensation scheme for vaccine injuries.



It also proposes the WHO Pathogen Access and Benefit-Sharing System, which urges countries to share pathogens and genomic sequences "within hours".



Diagnostics, treatments and vaccines developed from the data should be shared fairly, including a provision that the



WHO gets 20% of any production - 10% as donation and the rest at affordable prices - for use in developing countries, the document suggests.

The plan aims to avoid countries sharing data on outbreaks not getting access to counter-measures developed using the data.

"The provisions on transparency and equity are impressive," Love said, "but I think negotiators need to do more work on how to create incentives for governments and others to both invest and share technologies".

(Reporting by Jennifer Rigby and Gabrielle Tétrault-Farber; Editing by Josephine Mason, Arun Koyyur and Bill Berkrot)

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