

16 April 2020

Dear Rt Hon Anne Marie Trevelyan MP, Secretary of State for International Development
Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP, Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

The race to develop a COVID-19 vaccine is an urgent priority as part of the global response to the pandemic. We welcome the announcements made by the government on new funding for research and development of a COVID-19 vaccine, including a combined £250 million from the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for International Development^{1 2 3} for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and £20 million from the Medical Research Council. These specific commitments for COVID-19 related R&D build on new and existing broader investments in medical R&D and health science facilities.

However, we are concerned that without a robust access strategy, there are no guarantees that a new COVID-19 vaccine developed with the support of UK public funding will be accessible to those who need it - whether they live in the UK or in developing countries. There is a real danger that without safeguards, pharmaceutical companies may gain exclusive rights to a new vaccine, which in turn could lead to price gouging and unaffordable prices for millions of people. Pharmaceutical companies could also create barriers for researchers that wish to build on the new knowledge and technologies that arise from publicly funded research. These would have grave implications for stopping the spread of this pandemic globally. It is imperative that the UK government takes firm action to ensure public investment prioritises public health over corporate profiteering.

The UK needs to call for global coordination of safeguards that ensure equitable access to new COVID-19 technologies developed by any country or institution. Without such safeguards, there may be stark global inequality in access to new COVID-19 technologies, as was experienced during the H1N1 flu outbreak in 2009 where the wealthiest countries bought up most of the vaccines first.

In the interests of global public health, we ask that you commit to the following steps:

- Impose public interest conditions on all UK funding committed to develop a vaccine for COVID-19 and any other potential COVID-19 treatment and diagnostics. These should:
 - Ensure the final product is affordable, accessible and available for everyone who needs it, within the UK as well as in other countries, including but not limited to low- and middle-income countries.
 - Stipulate, as a condition of public funding, that any vaccine or medical product developed is licensed according to the principles of socially responsible licensing, which includes but is not limited to preventing exclusive licensing. Socially responsible licensing could include licensing to the Medicines Patent Pool.
 - Ensure that clinical trial results from all publicly funded research are uploaded onto a WHO primary clinical trial registry or onto Clinicaltrials.gov

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/20m-announced-to-fund-vaccines-for-coronavirus-and-other-infectious-diseases>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-new-funding-in-fight-against-spread-of-coronavirus>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-announces-record-funding-to-find-a-coronavirus-vaccine>

- Commit to full price transparency of any products deriving from UK government funding.
 - Ensure the research and development costs of any product produced using public funding are publicly available and shared with other governments and the WHO - for example through the WHO's Global Observatory on Health R&D.
 - Introduce 'step-in' rights for the UK government to issue non-exclusive licenses if a licensing partner fails to comply with the requirements of providing the health technology at an affordable and fair price.
- As a donor country and board member of CEPI, the UK government should support CEPI's continued efforts to ensure equitable access to vaccines globally, and work to ensure that any products developed with support from CEPI are available and affordable to all those who need them.
 - Support global co-ordination to improve global and public capacity for vaccines production and ensure that public health priorities drive the production and distribution of any new COVID-19 vaccine.
 - Support the proposal⁴ from the President and Minister of Health of Costa Rica for the WHO to create a global pool for rights in COVID-19 related technologies for the detection, prevention, control and treatment of the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - Issue crown use licenses for any patented technologies that are potentially useful for tackling COVID-19, in response to this public health emergency, where patient access or research may be restricted by patent monopolies.

The pledges from the UK government to CEPI include the single largest contribution by any country to date for CEPI's COVID-19 efforts. These commitments come with a responsibility to ensure that any resulting vaccine is accessible, affordable and available to all.

We urge the UK to lead the world in ensuring equitable access for all to affordable technologies to respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

We look forward to hearing from you on these points soon.

Yours sincerely

Global Justice Now
 STOPAIDS
 Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) Access Campaign and MSF UK
 Oxfam
 Save the Children UK
 CAFOD
 Health Poverty Action
 Universities Allied for Essential Medicines
 RESULTS UK

⁴ President and Minister of Health of Costa Rica ask WHO to create global pool for rights in COVID-19 related technologies dated 23 March 2020. Available online <https://www.keionline.org/32556>

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