

# WHO Director-General's opening remarks at the media briefing on COVID-19 – 12 March 2021

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  - More than 335 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered globally so far, and no deaths have been found to have been caused by COVID-19 vaccines. But at least 2.6 million people have been killed by the virus.
  - Today, WHO gave emergency use listing to Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine, making it the fourth vaccine to receive WHO's approval. Emergency use listing is the green light for a vaccine to be procured and rolled out by COVAX. The COVAX Facility has booked 500 million doses of the J&J vaccine, and we look forward to receiving them as soon as possible.
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Good morning, good afternoon and good evening.

As countries roll out COVID-19 vaccines, WHO is continuing to keep a close eye on their safety.

WHO is aware that some countries have suspended the use of AstraZeneca vaccines, based on reports of blood clots in some people who received doses of the vaccine from two batches.

This measure was taken as a precaution while a full investigation is finalised.

It is important to note that the European Medicines Agency has said there is no indication of a link between the vaccine and blood clots, and that the vaccine can continue to be used while its investigation is ongoing.

WHO's Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety systematically reviews safety signals, and is carefully assessing the current reports on the AstraZeneca vaccine.

As soon as WHO has gained a full understanding of these events, the findings and any changes to our current recommendations will be communicated immediately to the public.

More than 335 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been administered globally so far, and no deaths have been found to have been caused by COVID-19 vaccines.

But at least 2.6 million people have been killed by the virus. And more will continue to die the longer it takes to distribute vaccines as rapidly and as equitably as possible.

The Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, which includes COVAX, was launched almost a year ago as the international vehicle for the equitable distribution of vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics.

The emergence of new viral variants, the limited supply of vaccines, the lag in uptake of new diagnostics and oxygen, and the lack of funding to support the distribution of these life-saving tools are a major challenge for the global control of the pandemic.

Today, WHO has published its new strategy and budget for the ACT Accelerator in 2021.

So far, 11 billion U.S. dollars have been committed to the ACT Accelerator, but we still face a funding gap of 22.1 billion dollars.

The longer this gap goes unmet, the harder it is to understand why, given it is a tiny fraction of the more than 13 trillion dollars the IMF estimates that high-income countries have spent on fiscal stimulus to date.

We urge countries to fully finance the ACT Accelerator as the best investment in the global recovery

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Today, WHO gave emergency use listing to Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine, making it the fourth vaccine to receive WHO's approval.

Emergency use listing is the green light for a vaccine to be procured and rolled out by COVAX.

As you know, the J&J vaccine is the first to be listed as a single-dose regimen.

WHO will convene its Strategic Advisory Group on Immunization Experts next week to formulate recommendations on the use of this vaccine.

As new vaccines become available, we must ensure they become part of the global solution, and not another reason some countries and people are left further behind.

We hope that this new vaccine will help to narrow vaccine inequalities, and not deepen them.

The COVAX Facility has booked 500 million doses of the J&J vaccine, and we look forward to receiving them as soon as possible.

Health workers and older people all round the world need this vaccine, COVAX is ready to deliver it, and countries are ready to roll it out.

In total, COVAX has now delivered almost 29 million doses of vaccine to 38 countries.

Globally, 335 million doses of vaccine have been administered in 144 economies. 76% of those are in 10 countries.

The inequitable distribution of vaccines remains the biggest threat to ending the pandemic and driving a global recovery.

As I said last week, one of the major challenges we need to solve is how to dramatically increase production of vaccines.

This week, WHO and our COVAX partners met with industry representatives and other stakeholders to identify issues and solutions.

Manufacturing any vaccine requires a lot of supplies, including glass vials and plastic filters, and the raw materials needed to make them.

The sudden increase in demand for vaccine production has led to a shortage of these and other supplies, which is limiting the production of vaccines for COVID-19 and could put the supply of routine childhood vaccines at risk.

Some countries have imposed legal restrictions on the export of critical supplies. This is putting lives at risk around the world.

We call on all countries not to stockpile supplies that are needed urgently to ramp up production of vaccines.

In a global pandemic, no country can go it alone. We are all inter-dependent.

And no country can simply vaccinate its way out of this pandemic.

We cannot end the pandemic anywhere unless we end it everywhere.

The longer the virus circulates, the higher the chances that variants will emerge that make vaccines less effective.

But variants don't make physical distancing less effective. They don't make hand hygiene, masks, ventilation and other public health measures less effective.

We must continue to do it all.

Christian, back to you.

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