

U.S. hoards millions of surplus vaccine doses as COVID-19 ravages the world



U.S. is hoarding vaccines while the rest of the world waits

Washington, May 5 (RHC)-- The United States could have as many as “three hundred million surplus COVID-19 vaccine doses” by the end of July even as India and other countries are struggling to curb the spread of the virus, reports say.

While more than 20 million Indians have been infected with the new coronavirus, the United States continues to hoard COVID-19 vaccine doses, despite warnings against the risk of coronavirus variants on the effectiveness of the inoculations.

U.S. President Joe Biden has repeatedly said his administration would help the rest of the world only after all Americans have access to vaccines, drawing condemnation from global health experts and advocates who slam his position as “increasingly untenable” amid India's deepening COVID-19 crisis and a growing global chasm in vaccination rates.

On Tuesday, India reported 357,229 new cases over the past 24 hours, bringing the total to 20.28 million. The country's COVID-19 death toll also rose by 3,449 to 222,408, according to Indian Health Ministry data.

Meanwhile, medical experts say the actual figures in India could be five to 10 times higher than those reported. “We are not dealing with one COVID pandemic. There are multiple strains involved, multiple pandemics really, in different parts of the country,” USA Today cited Manoj Gopalakrishna, CEO of the nonprofit group CARE India, as saying on Monday.

The crisis has left India's healthcare system completely overwhelmed and hospitals emptied of medical oxygen vital for the survival for those infected. Even wood used in funeral pyres is in shortage.

The surge in cases comes amid a dramatic drop in vaccinations, due to problems with supplies and delivery. The crisis has drawn attention to the unequal access to vaccines. According to Our World in Data, around 43% of Americans have received at least one dose, compared with less than 9% of India's population.

The World Health Organization says more than one billion vaccine doses have been administered globally, but 82% of shots have been given in high- and middle-income countries and just 0.3% in low-income nations. “It is an apartheid,” Winnie Byanyima, executive director of UNAIDS, said in a briefing last week hosted by the ONE Campaign, an anti-poverty and global health nonprofit.

The U.S. faces mounting pressure to take a range of steps to expand vaccine access, including sharing more of its doses. Rep. Tom Malinowski, a former State Department official, said on Monday the U.S. would not use its AstraZeneca vaccine supply so it should share all of it with India and other countries “the moment that can be safely done.”

“There is nothing wrong with engaging in ‘vaccine diplomacy,’” Malinowski said in a statement Monday, stressing that the US had a special obligation to India and other allies. The U.S. will have adequate vaccine doses to meet the U.S. demand for vaccines in mid-to-late May, according to an April 20 analysis by the Kaiser Family Foundation.

Arthur Caplan, a professor of bioethics at the NYU School of Medicine in New York City, warned that the longer the Biden administration postponed sharing its vaccine surplus, the greater the risk would be that more virulent coronavirus variants emerge and circle back to hit the US population.

In January, at the 2021 Executive Board session of the World Health Organization, Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus described the hoarding of COVID-19 vaccines by wealthy countries as a “catastrophic moral failure.”

This hoarding has continued, and by mid-March, 14 percent of the world's population had access to more than half its vaccines. American online magazine Slate on Monday reported: “Modeling suggests that this trend of wealthy countries stockpiling COVID-19 vaccines will result in nearly twice as many deaths as would occur if vaccines were shared equally across the globe, with an economic cost running into the trillions of dollars.”

The report warned that failure to vaccinate globally “may also give time for new variants to undermine existing vaccinations, and draw out the pandemic.”

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