

COVID-19 could be a game-changer, as scientists race to develop a vaccine

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COVID-19 could and should be a game-changer, and may see improvements to global health regulations making vaccines faster to develop, test and introduce in the future, according to an expert in health

policy and law from The University of Western Australia.

Dr. Marco Rizzi from the UWA Law School said current health frameworks facilitated fast research and development for [influenza vaccines](#), but for other pandemic and epidemic diseases there was much more work to be done.

"Public health is the biggest priority and should be the exclusive driver in fast-tracking vaccines," Dr. Rizzi said.

"With COVID-19, authorities are dealing with a pandemic that is deadly, not just for global health but for economies worldwide and people's standards of living."

Dr. Rizzi said comparing COVID-19 to other coronaviruses, it was clear we had entered uncharted waters. He said coronaviruses were known to scientists, but more attention was needed to enable the faster development of vaccines.

"We are facing unprecedented times with a virus that is new and unknown," he said. "This will be a real test for [policy makers](#) to consider how they will ensure that when a [vaccine](#) is found, it can be swiftly administered across the globe.

"Looking at previous viruses that have impacted global health, such as the swine flu in 2009 and the Ebola crisis from 2014, both were relatively known viruses at the time of outbreak.

"With swine flu, vaccines were made promptly because of the level of research and regulatory facilitation that already existed. With Ebola on the other hand, despite it being a known virus it took until 2019 to have the first vaccine approved. Similarly, with COVID-19 we lack the type of international regulatory infrastructure that exists for influenza.

"This is a real issue because [swine flu](#) and Ebola were also far more contained than COVID-19 which has now spread across the globe."

Dr. Rizzi said developing a vaccine was critical so that recurrent cycles of infection did not develop.

"We have complex times ahead and there are international, regional and domestic considerations which can either cooperate or conflict," he said.

"For example [public health](#), biosecurity and market efficiency are not always compatible and this will be very challenging for world leaders."

With a vaccine still estimated to be at least 12 months away, Dr. Rizzi said drastic measures would need to be taken to speed up the development of a vaccine.

"This will change global health policy as we know it," he said. "This is not the last pandemic we are likely to see and hopefully it will be a catalyst for improvements to [health policy](#) so that in the future we are able to promptly and effectively develop vaccines for emerging health threats."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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