

Global vaccines programme gets \$8.8bn shot in the arm

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Governments around the world on Thursday pledged \$8.8 billion for

global vaccines alliance Gavi to help immunisation programmes disrupted by coronavirus, prompting calls for global cooperation to ensure a potential COVID-19 vaccine is available to all.

The online meeting beat a target to raise \$7.4 billion to provide vaccines at a much reduced cost to 300 million children worldwide over the next five years.

More than 50 countries took part as well as individuals such as billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates, whose foundation pledged \$1.6 billion.

Gavi also launched a new initiative to purchase potential COVID-19 vaccines, scale-up production and support delivery to developing nations, which raised \$567 million in seed money.

"Together, we rise to fulfil the greatest shared endeavour of our lifetimes—the triumph of humanity over disease," said British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who hosted the summit.

"Today we make the choice to unite, to forge a path of global cooperation."

Scientists around the world are racing to develop and test a coronavirus vaccine and United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres said it must be available to everyone.

"A vaccine must be seen as a global public good—a people's vaccine, which a growing number of world leaders are calling for," he said in a video message.



US billionaire philanthropist Bill Gates stumped up \$1.6 billion for the vaccine drive

There needs to be "global solidarity to ensure that every person, everywhere, has access".

The pandemic has exposed new ruptures in international cooperation, notably with US President Donald Trump's decision to pull out of the World Health Organization (WHO).

But Gavi chief executive Seth Berkley insisted there must be a "global perspective".

"At the end of the day, if you have large outbreaks of COVID anywhere

in the world, it threatens the world," he said.

Doesn't discriminate

The United States pledged \$1.16 billion to Gavi's fundraising drive, and Trump sent a recorded message to the conference.

"As the coronavirus has shown, there are no borders. It doesn't discriminate," he said.

"It's mean, it's nasty. But we can all take care of it together... we will work hard. We will work strong."

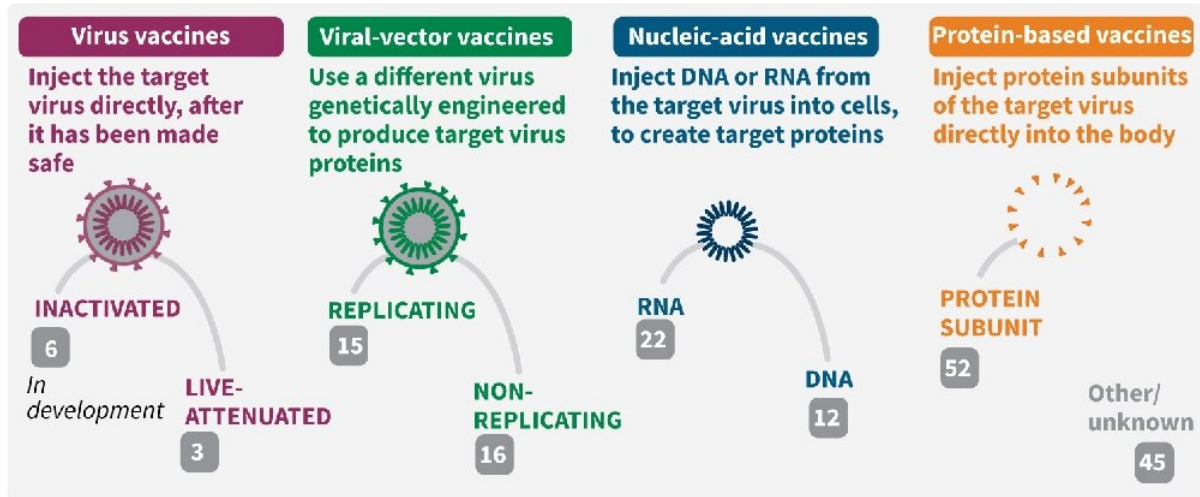
The coronavirus pandemic has infected more than 6.5 million and killed over 385,000 people since emerging in China last December, according to an AFP tally of official sources.

Race for a COVID-19 vaccine

There are currently 171 vaccine candidates according to a tracker developed by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine

Four main approaches

All aimed at safely triggering the body's natural immune response to SARS-CoV-2



Source: Vaccine pipeline/Nature journal

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Graphic on the number and types of vaccines in development in the fight against the global pandemic

If a vaccine is developed, Microsoft founder Gates said Gavi hoped to be able to buy it for the poorest countries.

He said pharmaceutical companies had been working together to try to secure the required production capacity.

"It's been amazing, the pharmaceutical companies stepping up to say 'yes, even if our vaccine is not the best, we will make our factories available'," he told BBC radio.

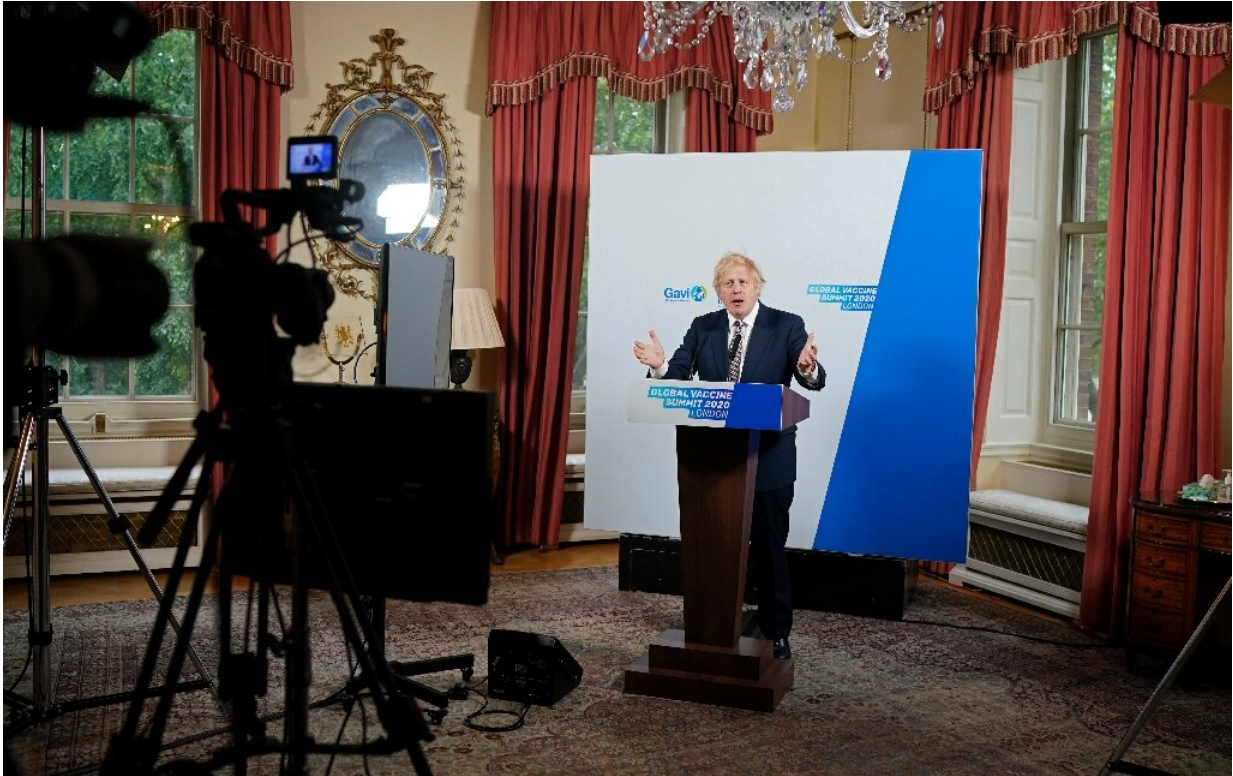
Immunisations disrupted

Stay-at-home orders have been imposed across the world to stem the spread of coronavirus, causing huge economic disruption and the suspension of routine immunisation programmes for preventable diseases such as measles and polio.

The WHO, UN children's agency UNICEF and Gavi warned last month that vaccine services were disrupted in nearly 70 countries, affecting some 80 million children under the age of one.

Polio eradication drives were suspended in dozens of countries, while measles vaccination campaigns were also put on hold in 27 countries, UNICEF said.

Recent modelling from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine estimated that for every coronavirus death prevented by halting vaccination campaigns in Africa, up to 140 people could die from vaccine-preventable diseases.



Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson hosted the Global Vaccine Summit online raising pledges of \$8.8 billion

Since it was formed in 2000, Gavi says it has helped to immunise more than 760 million children.

But Berkley warned: "These historic advances in global health are now at risk of unravelling as COVID-19 causes unprecedented disruption to vaccine programmes worldwide."

Ethiopian President Sahle-Work Zewde told the meeting that her nation had seen "how the life of a helpless child is transformed to a better future through immunisations".

She added: "As much as a coordinated and cooperative global response is needed to develop a COVID-19 vaccine, we should not lose sight of the fact that the vaccine's success is strongly linked to maintaining routine immunisation.

"Which means the need to maintain the supply chain and the immunisation infrastructure as well."

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