

World must work together on health crises: vaccine group chief

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The coronavirus crisis should be a wake-up call for the international community to stop the "boom and bust" cycle of vaccine research and public health preparation, the head of the global vaccine alliance has said.

In a recent interview with AFP, Seth Berkley of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance said countries should work together to tackle the pandemic and other health crises.

Earlier this month Gavi and its partners attracted pledges of \$8.8 billion for its five-year programme to immunise 300 million children for a range of preventable diseases.

But on Friday the World Health Organisation said it had only received pledges of \$3.4 billion of an estimated \$30 billion needed to speed up the development and production of COVID-19 tests, vaccines and treatments.

What are your concerns with the way the coronavirus crisis has been handled so far?

"We are in a situation now where different governments are out trying to buy one [vaccine](#) or another.

"The tragedy is if you bet on one, or two, or three vaccines you have a reasonable chance that you are going to end up with nothing.

"If it does work, we want to make sure others get it. And if it doesn't, we want to make sure you get access to the vaccines that do."

There have been issues in the past, including for coronaviruses SARS and MERS, where funding for vaccine research dried up when the disease dissipated. What are your concerns around this?

"It is crazy. The amount of money it would have taken to finish those

would have been just a drop in the bucket and you would have a vaccine that you knew worked.

"When I ran the fundraising for Ebola in 2014/ 2015, every government was saying 'Money doesn't matter, whatever it takes, this is a global crisis'. Three months later I'm going around trying to get money for the vaccines and people said: 'Oh, that's yesterday's problem'.

"This is one of the challenges, this boom and bust cycle."

How will you reach the tens of millions of children who missed out on routine vaccinations because of coronavirus restrictions?

"That is a real challenge, given that you don't have perfect systems for follow up in some of the more fragile and difficult countries.

"The challenge will be to work with community leaders and get the message out of the importance of bringing your families back in to complete immunisation.

"We are lucky so far we haven't seen any wide-scale outbreaks, but it is a bit of a race as population immunity goes down."

How concerned are you about conspiracy theories related to vaccines and COVID-19?

"First of all this starts from fear, but there's no question that fear has been fanned by nefarious forces that are trying to create disruptions and lack of confidence and that's obviously a very scary place to be.

"The intentional spread of false information is not only at an all time

high, but it also is being amplified by social media tools that didn't exist 20 years ago and so we have an almost perfect storm of problems.

"A lot of this is spreading from the [northern hemisphere](#).

"Traditionally, developing countries are quite confident to take vaccines because they see the diseases, they know how bad they can be.

"They know of people who have died or become disabled."

How could we do things better?

"This is a global problem that needs a global solution and we have to all work together.

"It's the right thing to do because of humanitarian and equity issues, but also from a global health security point of view.

"We saw the virus move from somewhere around Wuhan to 180 countries in less than three months, including islands and isolated areas. Nobody is safe unless everybody's safe.

"I think the challenge is to get the world to not, every time there's an emergency run to deal with it and then forget about it again. But rather to work to make sure a system is in place and that we can move quickly when outbreaks occur.

"And it is inevitable there will be more outbreaks. There are 30,000 coronaviruses in the database from many different animals. This is the same problem we're going to have on global warming and climate change.

"There are some problems you can't solve just by looking inward."

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