

It's morally wrong for rich nations to hoard COVID-19 vaccine

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Rich nations should not engage in "vaccine nationalism" and keep the COVID-19 vaccine to themselves when poorer nations need them, according to Nicole Hassoun, professor of philosophy at Binghamton University, State University of New York. Hassoun's paper, "Against Vaccine Nationalism," was published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*.

While rich countries like the US and UK are starting to vaccinate their populations against COVID-19, [poor countries](#) may lack access to a vaccine for years. Canada, for instance, has already secured enough to vaccinate its entire population nine times over, and the US, European Union, UK, Australia, and Japan can vaccinate their populations between 2-8x.

"Vaccine nationalism is neither ethically justified, nor even in rich countries' long term self-interest," said Hassoun. "No one deserves the luck of their birth and few have much control over their country of residence. So when there are four ventilators per 12 million people in some [developing countries](#), and people are being buried in cardboard boxes in [mass graves](#), it is simply unconscionable to argue that wealthy countries can keep their vaccines to themselves or even help their populations first. Vaccine nationalism fails to respect [basic human rights](#) and the people that have them."

National leaders make promises and undertake commitments to protect their own, but they can't always prioritize their own citizens, said Hassoun. She believes that when national leaders engage in international efforts they adopt new role responsibilities—doing so often requires national leaders to act for the (global) common good.

"Consider an analogy—suppose a CEO is morally bound to advance the interests of stakeholders but learns that her company is profiting from polluting the Amazon. Is it acceptable for her to continue to allow her company to do so? Clearly not. Similarly, if her company could help avert a genocide or otherwise save many lives at some cost to shareholders, she might be morally bound to do so."

Hassoun also pointed out that it's in rich countries' long-term interests to equitably distribute vaccines.

"The COVID pandemic may continue to circle the globe for much longer (or indefinitely) if we do not fight it where the worst outbreaks are occurring," said Hassoun. "And herd immunity in [rich countries](#) is by no means guaranteed. Helping establish basic health infrastructure internationally (to not only [vaccinate](#) against COVID but a host of vaccine-preventable diseases) could greatly lower the global burden of disease."

More information: Nicole Hassoun, Against vaccine nationalism, *Journal of Medical Ethics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1136/medethics-2020-107193](https://doi.org/10.1136/medethics-2020-107193)

Provided by Binghamton University

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