

Pool patents to get COVID-19 vaccines and drugs to all

We call on pharmaceutical companies to contribute to a pool of patents set up by the World Health Organization (WHO). That will speed up the manufacture of generic, affordable COVID-19 vaccines and treatments while protecting firms' incentives to invest in future research. The WHO's COVID-19 Technology Access Pool has so far received no contributions from industry. Asking governments in rich nations to donate vaccines to lower-income countries (see G. Yamey *Nature* 590, 529; 2021) will not hasten manufacture. India and South Africa have proposed suspending patents related to COVID-19 products, but companies contend that this could dent drug development. The practice of pooling patented technologies for the production of medicines (see *Nature* 581, 240; 2020) already occurs for HIV, hepatitis C and tuberculosis treatments. Fees are typically lower when licences are negotiated as a bundle with generics producers, implying increased volume (J. Lerner and J. Tirole *Innov. Policy Econ.* 8, 157–186; 2007). Yet firms can anticipate extra revenue from participation in a voluntary pool, and thus be more willing to maintain innovation and share know-how than with compulsory licensing.

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