

For Immediate Release
Thursday, December 23, 2021

Contact: Patricia Green
Patricia.s.green@duke.edu
+1.301.520.6482

As Omicron Spreads Rapidly Around the World, Experts Outline Urgent Actions to Accelerate Vaccine Coverage for Low- and Middle-Income Countries

In addition to improving predictable vaccine access, experts recommend effective strategies for different kind of arms race—the race to get vaccines from airports into arms before additional variants emerge

Washington, DC—Omicron’s rapid and relentless advance across continents proves once again that a global pandemic requires a global plan of attack. Most low-income countries have yet to achieve 20 percent coverage with COVID-19 vaccinations while most wealthy countries are close to 70 percent. Converting vaccines to vaccinations is becoming the key to winning the race between vaccines and variants.

The slow supply of vaccines has compounded structural and systemic challenges to transform vaccines into vaccinations in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Nearly 70 experts convened last week to examine these bottlenecks and craft a blueprint of actions to address them in a new report issued today, [From Airports to Arms: New Insights and Urgent Recommendations to Accelerate Global COVID-19 Vaccinations](#).

The report discusses three cross-cutting challenges, specifically the need for national leadership and trust, timely access to financing, and prioritizing speed and scale of vaccinations, along with multiple practical barriers to vaccination, which must be addressed simultaneously along with empowering country-level leadership and decision-making to end the pandemic everywhere.

“While high-income countries focus intensely on addressing their domestic challenges with the Omicron variant, we cannot lose sight of the urgent need for a coordinated, global response to curb this pandemic worldwide,” said **Dr. Krishna Udayakumar, director of Duke University’s Global Health Innovation Center**. “We must collectively commit to more effective, equitable, and urgent efforts, at national, regional, and global levels, to vaccinate the world and undertake additional public health measures that improve our response to this pandemic.”

The recommendations released today come from the COVID Global Accountability Platform ([COVID GAP](#)), led by Duke University and the COVID Collaborative, working alongside representatives from the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF, and Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), with support from The Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

“Timely, predictable access to high-quality vaccines remains an important challenge, but we must also urgently address bottlenecks to vaccination to get this pandemic under control,” said **Dr. Ahmed Ogwell**

Ouma, Deputy Director of the Africa CDC. “Vaccines arriving at airports is just the beginning of a journey that has many obstacles—from a lack of refrigeration, syringes and health workers to competing priorities—that can impede the path to vaccination. But there also are many ways to overcome them. Collaborations such as the one that has led to this report are critical to bring together national, regional, and global leaders to jointly tackle complex problems.”

With global production now reaching over one billion doses per month, “Airport to Arms” identifies important, practical strategies—and actionable recommendations—that can work in concert to convert vaccines into vaccinations. The report offers “cross-cutting” recommendation in three key areas and a blueprint for continued work by COVID GAP to identify additional strategies and solutions to accelerate vaccinations.

- **Substantial global support for country-led vaccination strategies and implementation must become an even higher global priority.**

Actionable recommendations are:

1. Ensure a whole-of-government approach with high-level political leadership and accountability to increase trust and drive vaccination uptake.
2. Establish cross-sector partnerships to augment government vaccination capabilities.
3. Make global support for vaccine rollout more responsive to country priorities.
4. Invest in regional engagement to improve and accelerate vaccination implementation.

- **Timely access to appropriate financing remains a major constraint for country-level vaccination and broader pandemic response.** To provide the financial tools and resources to enable LMICs to scale-up effective vaccination, donors and multilateral development banks (MDBs) must simplify and speed up access to funding, and country-level and global costing projections must be updated and aligned to focus stakeholders on specific, shared targets.

Actionable recommendations are:

1. Simplify and speed up access to funding from donors and multilateral development banks.
2. Update and align country-level and global costing projections.

- **With the urgency of an active global pandemic, immediate vaccination strategies should prioritize speed and scale, with the goal of transitioning to sustainability.** Countries can accelerate progress by focusing on quick deployment of vaccines, linked to robust monitoring, surveillance, and feedback. Urgent investments into COVID-19 response can then be leveraged to strengthen longer-term health system capabilities.

Actionable recommendations are:

1. Establish and adapt country-level vaccination strategy to prioritize the quick deployment of vaccines, linked to robust monitoring, surveillance, and feedback.
2. Leverage urgent investments in COVID-19 response to strengthen longer-term health system capabilities.

“Millions of lives have been lost around the world despite the unprecedented pace of safe and effective vaccine development and scaled-up manufacturing leading to billions of doses,” said **Ann Lindstrand, Unit Head, WHO.** “Inequitable access to these life-saving tools have prolonged the

acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic and cost lives, while upending livelihoods and economies. We offer actionable steps to change this trajectory and reduce global vulnerability to the COVID virus.”

The report outlines solutions to a number of technical impediments to accelerating vaccinations, including understanding vaccine demand, building up the health care workforce, addressing the supply chain and logistics, and improving data systems.

“We possess all the necessary tools and resources to urgently save more lives and end the pandemic more quickly,” said **Benjamin Schreiber, ACT-A Coordinator, UNICEF**. “We can, and must, do more to equitably vaccinate the world.”

###

About COVID GAP

The COVID Global Accountability Platform (COVID GAP), led by Duke University and COVID Collaborative, aims to improve and accelerate global pandemic response by serving as an independent source of insights and actionable recommendations, convening key stakeholders to galvanize actions and collaborations, and strengthening transparency and accountability. Find out more: <https://covid19gap.org/>.

About the World Health Organization (WHO)

WHO is the United Nations agency that connects nations, partners and people to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable – so everyone, everywhere can attain the highest level of health. WHO leads global efforts to expand universal health coverage. We direct and coordinate the world’s response to health emergencies. And we promote healthier lives – from pregnancy care through old age. Our Triple Billion targets outline an ambitious plan for the world to achieve good health for all, using science-based policies and programmes.

About UNICEF

UNICEF works in some of the world’s toughest places, to reach the world’s most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone.

About African Union

The African Union (AU) is a continental body consisting of the 55 Member States that make up the countries of the African Continent. It was officially launched in 2002 as a successor to the Organisation of African Unity (OAU, 1963-1999). <https://au.int/en/overview>

About Africa CDC

Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC), is a specialized technical institution of the African Union that strengthens the capacity and capability of Africa’s public health institutions as well as partnerships to detect and respond quickly and effectively to disease threats and outbreaks, based on data-driven interventions and programmes. Learn more at: www.africacdc.org