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## **Weakening patent protection for COVID-19 vaccines does not help to accelerate vaccine production but endangers science-based innovation**

**The proposal to the WTO, to weaken the patent protection for COVID-19 vaccines, incorrectly portrays IP as the barrier to rapid access to vaccines. While this initiative does not address the crisis in an effective manner, it does send an extremely dangerous signal to innovators and investors alike. A robust and reliable IP protection is indispensable for science-based innovation. What sounds good at first glance is dangerous as it risks to significantly weaken our ability to foster and finance healthcare innovation.**

History will remember the speed with which COVID-19 vaccines were developed as one of science and biotechnology's greatest achievements. In record time, biotechnology companies initiated over 900 global projects aimed at developing COVID vaccines, treatments, and diagnostics.

In parallel, public and private players have worked relentlessly to increase manufacturing capacities in Europe and around the globe to ensure that the newly developed medicine can be produced and distributed as quickly as possible. The global COVAX initiative ([www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/COVAX-explained](http://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/COVAX-explained)) was established, designed to equitably distribute vaccines across the world, also to people and countries that cannot afford to buy the vaccines at market prices.

Thanks to this unprecedented effort and the accelerated global collaboration, production capacities have been increased significantly and new innovative supply chains activated at record speed. Today, there is the prospect of vaccines for 70% of the global population by the end of 2021.

Contrary to some commentators, it is actually the IP rules that have enabled this unprecedented level of innovation and enabled the urgently needed collaboration between biopharma innovators and partners. It is the same IP system that has created the conditions to build the expertise and infrastructures, mobilize necessary resources and amass technical knowledge required to combat the pandemic. This has supported advanced breakthrough technologies, including mRNA vaccines.

The current IP and licensing framework enables an efficient and controlled know-how and technology transfer. Given the huge global demand, all owner of Covid-19 vaccines IP have a vital interest to help expanding the production. Manufacturing agreements with developing countries have already been signed through technology licensing as part of the global effort to expand capacity as rapidly as possible.

Weakening patent protection would in fact risk to slow down the production of vaccines and complicate global coordination. At the same time, it would have significant unintended negative consequences:

- An expansion of production capacity outside of the current IP and licensing framework risks to be much slower. Involuntary transfer of technologies could foster a wave of chaotic vaccine nationalism, as countries endeavor to bypass cooperative global efforts and develop national production.
- Given the current bottleneck situations for vaccine inputs and manufacturing specialists, waiving IP could even slow down the production at the current regulatorily approved vaccine production operations.
- Weakening the IP rights would send a very dangerous message to those that have invested in the build-up of technologies and enabled this tremendous success. Not just in vaccine innovation but in all areas of research and development. The global IP system has been built to protect this vital innovation power.

In the long run, the proposal to weaken patent protection for COVID-19 vaccines would undermine the current vaccine eco-system. It would have a detrimental effect on incentives for biotechnology companies and their partners that take risks to find solutions for the next health emergency and all other medical needs. It would send the wrong messages to investors just when their support is needed most.

So, what may sound good at first glance, turns out to be ineffective and even counter-productive for the vaccine production itself, and it would establish a tremendously dangerous precedent to undermine the trust in the IP framework globally. A trust that is vital if we want to maintain a strong healthcare system and maintain our ability to also effectively address the medical challenges of the future.

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**About the Swiss Biotech Association**

Founded in 1998, the Swiss Biotech Association represents the interests of the Swiss biotech industry. To support its members in a competitive market, the association works to secure favorable framework conditions and facilitate access to talents, novel technologies and financial resources. To strengthen and promote the Swiss biotech industry, the Swiss Biotech Association collaborates with numerous partners and life science clusters globally under the brand Swiss Biotech™. For further information see [swissbiotech.org](https://www.swissbiotech.org).