



High-level Side Event during the White House COVID-19 Summit on the margins of the UN General Assembly

Saving Lives, Saving Livelihoods

Achieving high-level, equitable, COVID-19 vaccination coverage in African Union (AU) Member States



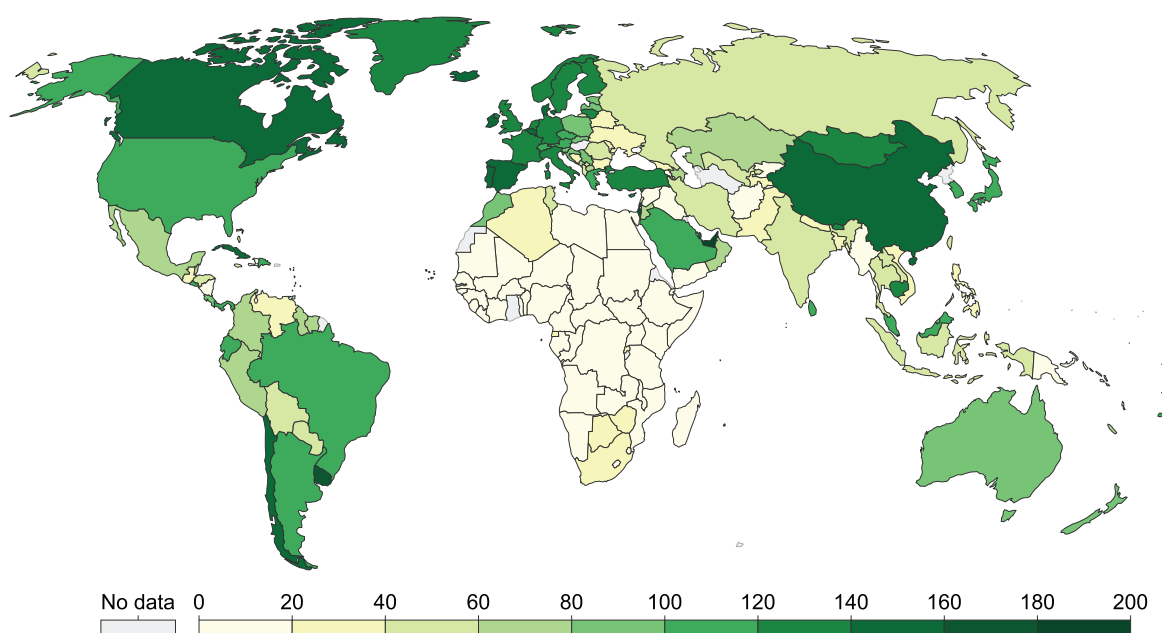
September 23, 2021

Register with this link:
shorturl.at/kEZ56

Background and Scope

The global community came together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. With significant investment into science and biotechnologies and information sharing, scientists discovered multiple safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines in record time. Additionally, WHO and GAVI established the COVAX Facility to ensure COVID-19 vaccines reach the arms of people and communities in most vulnerable situations globally. Africa CDC led implementation of the AU's Continental Strategy for COVID-19.

To date, 5.29 billion COVID-19 doses have been administered globally with 39.5% of the world's population receiving at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine¹. Despite these important successes to date, COVID-19 vaccination coverage has been uneven and inequitable. Only 1.7% of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose².



Source: Official data collated by Our World in Data – Last updated 15 September 2021, 10:40 (London time), [OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus](https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus)

While COVID-19 vaccine rollout to date has given hope that an end to the acute phase of the pandemic is within reach there are significant gaps in access to COVID-19 vaccines for AU member states. To realize the full potential of these vaccines, they must be distributed in an equitable manner both globally and within countries.

This event will provide a platform to discuss the challenges faced to date by AU member states in accessing COVID-19 vaccines and ensuring successful country level rollout of the limited vaccines that have been accessed. As COVAX anticipates a tenfold increase in vaccine supply over the coming months (from 210 million doses distributed until now to 1.9 billion doses distributed by the end of 2021) the side event provides a forum to discuss the enormous opportunities to rapidly expand vaccination coverage within Africa.

A vaccine by itself, however, is not enough. The pandemic has exposed long-standing health and social inequities and a rise of mistrust in vaccines. Decreasing perceptions of

1 <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>

2 <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>

risk, pandemic fatigue and mistrust of authorities have led to refusal by many people to follow public health measures to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Experience to date has shown us that COVID-19 vaccine rollout will only be successful if there is an immediate effort to build community trust, especially with those isolated from or wary of authorities. Addressing people's concerns will be critical to ensuring uptake of the vaccines. Trained community health workers and leaders and Red Cross and Red Crescent volunteers, play a critical role in reaching otherwise inaccessible and disenfranchised populations, and in listening to and responding to their concerns.

Communities may have higher rates of vaccine hesitancy from many reasons, including misinformation, rumor spreading, historical experience of medical violence, negative personal experiences and/or discrimination in the healthcare system, lack of access to information, lack of access to services, lack of acceptance of and access to routine immunizations, and lack of trust in public authorities among other factors. As such, local leadership and contextualization in the vaccine rollout is critical to successfully ending the pandemic.

Achieving equitable distribution and access to COVID-19 vaccines is critical for all our health. Experts warned, without widespread vaccination campaigns, in combination with public health measures like mask wearing, COVID-19 variants would evolve and spread. After a number of COVID-19 vaccines became available in December 2019, countries began vaccination campaigns. According to WHO, disparity between countries and within countries are leaving large portions of the global population unvaccinated. Even among countries with higher vaccination rates, multiple variants are spreading at higher contagion rates with worse health outcomes. Countries and communities with lower vaccination rates continue to face the full health and socioeconomic impacts of the COVID-19 virus and its variants. Future variants may become increasingly resistant to the current COVID-19 vaccines. The only way to end the pandemic is to implement equitable and widespread vaccine rollout.

Objectives

Africa CDC, IFRC's representation to the AU, USAU and our partners (to be specified) seek to foster solidarity in Africa's COVID-19 vaccination efforts.

To this end, this event seeks to:

- galvanize governments of AU member states and humanitarian actors to implement equitable and inclusive vaccine rollouts for COVID-19 vaccines and routine immunizations;
- outline ways to increase demand for COVID-19 vaccines, including community ownership, and trust building initiatives;
- discuss approaches to minimize the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic and protect livelihoods
- encourage governments and global health actors to prioritize the leadership of frontline community health workers and volunteers and local actors in the vaccine rollout strategy at every level.

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