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FEATURED Q&A

Should 'Vaccine Nationalism' Worry Latin America?



As companies race to develop a vaccine against Covid-19, there are concerns about countries potentially banning its export as they seek to inoculate their populations first. // File Photo: U.S. Air Force.

Q No nation in Latin America and the Caribbean was listed among the World Health Organization's top 15 countries in the world most actively pursuing a vaccine for Covid-19, according to data cited in a recent Wall Street Journal report. Pharmaceutical company executives told the newspaper they are bracing for export bans on future coronavirus vaccines, a move that public health experts call "vaccine nationalism," as countries race to immunize their own populations first. Is vaccine nationalism likely to take hold in countries producing vaccines, and how important of a concern is it for Latin America and the Caribbean? How should eventual vaccines be distributed in a fair manner and in ways that ensure poor populations have access to it? What more could governments of the region be doing now to prepare for orderly and efficient introduction of coronavirus vaccines?

A **Núria Homedes, executive director of Salud y Fármacos:** "Infectious diseases have always represented a global menace requiring a well-crafted and coordinated global response. Latin American countries are not taking the lead in vaccine development, but many Latin Americans are participating in clinical trials initiated by other countries or by multinationals. Denying them access to effective vaccines or treatments would not only be unethical, but also detrimental to the rest of the world. Effective interventions should be treated as a global public good and be made accessible and affordable to the entire world, especially when considering the amount of philanthropic and public resources devoted to their development. This would be easiest if inventors issued open licenses. Alternatively, the WHO and Unitaid are

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TODAY'S NEWS

POLITICAL

Venezuela Court Rules Assembly Failed to Name Election Officials

Venezuela's Supreme Court ruled that the opposition-controlled National Assembly failed to name rectors to the electoral authority in time, complicating plans for this year's scheduled elections.

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ECONOMIC

Colombia Expects \$6.58 Bn Fall in National Income

Colombia's government said coronavirus-related lockdowns and low oil prices will result in a drop in national income.

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POLITICAL

El Salvador's Bukele Vetoes Measure to Reopen Economy

Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele for the second time vetoed a measure to gradually reopen the economy following lockdowns designed to curb the spread of Covid-19.

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Bukele // File Photo: Salvadoran Government.

POLITICAL NEWS

Court Rules Against Venezuela Assembly on Election Officials

Venezuela's Supreme Court on Friday ruled against the opposition-led National Assembly, saying it failed to name rectors to the electoral authority in time, a move that the opposition blasted as an effort to disrupt the country's legislative election, Reuters reported. The decision by the court, which is loyal to President Nicolás Maduro, came as the opposition and Maduro's government have sought to agree on conditions for the vote due by the end of this year. Shortly after the opposition took control of the National Assembly in 2015, the court declared its decisions invalid. "Today's events obstruct the designation of the CNE," said opposition lawmaker and National Assembly Vice President Juan Pablo Guanipa, referring to the national electoral council. "They are trying to name a CNE that will worsen the problems." If the opposition loses control of the National Assembly, the status of its leader, Juan Guaidó, could be placed in doubt. Dozens of countries recognize Guaidó as Venezuela's legitimate interim president.

Brazil Stops Reports on Cumulative Covid Cases, Deaths

Brazil's government has stopped reporting cumulative totals of the country's number of Covid-19 cases and deaths, a move that comes as both totals spiral upward, the Associated Press reported Saturday. The same day, President Jair Bolsonaro, who has downplayed the threat of the disease, said the running totals are "not representative" of the country's current situation. The health ministry replaced the cumulative total on its website with a daily tally that shows only the numbers of cases and deaths in the previous 24 hours. Public prosecutors in Brazil said they would investigate the

health ministry's justification for the change in reporting. Carlos Wizard, an ally of Bolsonaro, told daily newspaper O Globo that some states had sent falsified information to the health ministry, implying that they were inflating the data. Wizard, a businessman who is expected to soon take a high-level position at the health ministry, said the government would seek to determine a "more accurate" tally. "The number we have today is fanciful or manipulated," he said. Brazil has more than 691,000 cases of Covid-19, the second-highest in the world after the United States, according to data aggregated by Johns Hopkins University. Brazil also has more than 36,000 reported deaths related to it, the third highest in the world, after the United States and the United Kingdom.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Colombia Estimates \$6.58 Billion Fall in National Income

Colombia's government estimated national income could fall by 23.7 trillion pesos (\$6.58 billion) this year due to coronavirus-related lockdowns and low oil prices, the government said in a decree published on Friday, Reuters reported. To make up for the lost income, the Andean nation could issue international and local bonds or use an available line of credit with the International Monetary Fund, the government added. "Those resources will be monetized to settle the lack of cash flow in pesos," the decree said. The reasons for the drop in income include the months-long, nationwide quarantine due to Covid-19, which halted much of the economy, the decree said. Although many sectors have begun to gradually reopen, tax collection—especially sales tax—is expected to be hard hit. The decree said that Colombia could more than make up for the fall, raising some 23.85 trillion pesos from a variety of sources, including international bond issues as well as issues of so-called TES local bonds and funds from natural gas. Other sources could include the IMF's approved two-year

NEWS BRIEFS

El Salvador's Bukele Vetoes Measure to Reopen Economy

Salvadoran President Nayib Bukele has for the second time vetoed emergency legislation that was drafted to gradually reopen the economy, his legal team said on Saturday, Reuters reported. Bukele's legal counsel, Conan Castro, said the president had vetoed the law that Congress passed on May 30 because it breached several constitutional guarantees, including the rights and health of workers and cooperation between branches of the government. Bukele had already vetoed a similar law last month, arguing public health was at risk.

Guatemala's President to Work Remotely After 18 Workers Test Positive

Guatemalan President Alejandro Giammattei said Sunday that he will work remotely and that the presidential offices will be disinfected after 18 employees at his office and on his security detail tested positive for Covid-19, Reuters reported. In a televised address, Giammattei said he and the country's vice president have tested negative for the disease.

Australia's SolGold Raises \$34.3 Million to Fund Exploration in Ecuador

Australia-based miner SolGold raised 27.1 million pounds (\$34.3 million) in a discounted share placement on Friday, surpassing its initial target, to fund the exploration of copper and gold in Ecuador, Reuters reported. The company had said it targeted at least 16 million pounds. It placed a total of 121 million new ordinary shares at a price of 21.5 pence per share, a discount of about 10 percent to SolGold's share price close of 24 pence the previous day. The miner signed a financing deal last month to develop its Alpala project in the Andean nation.

flexible credit line of about \$10.8 billion. The Finance Ministry has forecast the economy will contract by around 5.5 percent this year. In the first quarter, Colombia's economy grew 1.1 percent, registering growth in January and February but a sharp contraction of 4.9 percent in March, according to the national statistics department, Portafolio reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

U.S. Orders Marriott to Wind Down Cuba Operations

The administration of U.S. President Donald Trump has ordered Marriott International to end hotel operations in Cuba by August, Reuters reported Friday, citing a company spokeswoman. The presence of Marriott in the Communist-run island had been a symbol of U.S.-Cuba détente, after Starwood Hotels, which Marriott owns, four years ago became the first U.S. hotel company to sign a deal with Cuba since the 1959 revolution. The government in 2018 reviewed and renewed Marriott's license to operate in the Caribbean nation. However, The Trump administration is seeking to pressure Cuba into democratic reform and to halt support of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, according to the report. "We have recently received notice that the government-issued license will not be renewed, forcing Marriott to cease operations in Cuba," according to the statement from the company, USA Today reported. "Marriott continues to believe that Cuba is a destination that travelers, including Americans, want to visit. Marriott looks forward to reopening in Cuba if and when the U.S. government gives us permission to do business there again," the statement added. The announcement came two days after the State Department expanded its blacklist of Cuban entities, with which U.S. citizens and companies are banned from doing business and which now includes the financial operation that handles U.S. remittances to the island. [See related [Q&A](#) in the June 3 issue of the Advisor.]

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establishing a patent pool, and countries could issue compulsory licenses. Latin America should start developing a vaccine manufacturing plan to supply its population of 600 million. To that effect, Latin American countries need to map their vaccine production capacity, issue compulsory licenses and ensure that vaccines produced under compulsory licenses are exported to those unable to produce it. This manufacturing plan needs to include an equitable distribution plan that favors those at greatest risk of infection and transmission, and of developing serious complications. In some countries, this will require strengthening the primary care level and outreach capacity. PAHO would be the natural entity to lead this regional effort, in coordination with global leaders. However, Trump's decision to pull out from the WHO might have eroded PAHO's capacity to lead."

A **Andrew Rudman, managing director at Monarch Global Strategies:** "A decision by any government to exercise 'vaccine nationalism' would be tragically short-sighted. The first Covid-19 vaccine to demonstrate safety and efficacy may not prove to be the safest and/or most effective months or years later. Further, successful development of a Covid-19 vaccine now does not guarantee similar success in developing the treatment for a future pandemic. Seeking to control access through some sort of export control or expropriation of a commercially developed vaccine would expose the implementing country to the risk of retaliation in the future and likely provoke similar behavior by other nations. Yet, concerns about hoarding or seeking to control distribution are certainly legitimate as evidenced by recent efforts around the world to limit the export of personal protective equipment and proposals to nationalize production of critical items. Concerned international organizations, private sector entities and others should lobby governments currently

hosting Covid-19 vaccine development to reject any sort of vaccine nationalism before the nationality of the first effective vaccine is known. Latin American researchers have the training and skill to develop an effective

“**A decision by any government to exercise 'vaccine nationalism' would be tragically short-sighted.**”

— Andrew Rudman

Covid-19 vaccine but are often stymied by the prevailing bias against the commercialization of academic research. The absence of any LAC nations in the top 15 should encourage Latin American universities to emulate peer institutions that successfully maintain academic integrity while bringing their research to market to the benefit of the university, the researchers and the general public. In the meantime, LAC regulatory agencies should adopt common review mechanisms or accept extraterritorial approvals to ensure that access to a Covid-19 vaccine is not impeded by duplicative trials and testing.”

A **Arachu Castro, Samuel Z. Stone Chair of Public Health in Latin America at Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine:** "While laboratories around the world scramble to discover an effective Covid-19 vaccine, we should all be concerned about its equitable distribution. The chaotic experience of accessing unpatented, low-level technologies, such as masks and other protective gear, should be avoided at all costs. This time around, while we long for the vaccine, political leaders have time, but not too much time, to decide what type of social organization they envision for their populations. The Latin American

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and Caribbean region is leading efforts to respond equitably to the pandemic. In April, the World Health Organization (WHO) designated Fiocruz in Brazil as Reference Laboratory for Covid-19 in the Americas to lead and support other countries in the region to develop diagnostic tests, medical treatments and vaccines. The Solidarity Call to Action that the Costa Rican government is promoting in partnership with the WHO calls 'key stakeholders and the global community to voluntarily pool knowledge, intellectual property and data necessary for Covid-19,' including vaccines. It has the endorsement of countries from Africa, Asia and Europe, in addition to Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Uruguay. Finally, the Global Movement for Sustainable Health Equity, led by prominent Latin American public health experts and garnering traction throughout the world, has proposed to the U.N. secretary general the creation of a Global Health Equity Task Force, housed within the WHO, to create a rights-based roadmap for the abolition of patents of any health technology that responds to the pandemic. If the vaccine is not seen as a public good, we will perpetuate these harrowing times."

A **Katherine E. Bliss, senior fellow at the CSIS Global Health Policy Center:** "The region is emerging as a Covid-19 hot spot, with the increasing number of cases driven by early delays in implementing social distancing, limited testing capabilities outside of urban centers and deferred health sector investments. In some countries, high rates of violence and chronic disease, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes, were placing stress on the health system well before the pandemic, and the diversion of

resources from routine services to outbreak response may further exacerbate weaknesses. Most experts agree that the development and widespread dissemination of a vaccine that protects against Covid-19 will be the best way to control the outbreak. More than 100 groups worldwide are pursuing a Covid-19 product, with unprecedented research collaboration among academic, corporate and public institutions in multiple

“Despite high capacity for vaccine research, particularly in Brazil, there is little reported activity in the region.”

— Katherine E. Bliss

countries. However, despite high capacity for vaccine research, particularly in Brazil, there is little reported activity in the region. Latin American and Caribbean nations can work through global forums, including the G20 and the Global Health Security Agenda, to which several of the countries belong, to encourage international agreement for the equitable distribution of any Covid-19 vaccine, including in countries that are not undertaking vaccine research. Governments can also agree to use the PAHO Revolving Fund for Vaccines to purchase a Covid-19 product in sufficient quantities to drive down the price and ensure availability to all countries in the region. In the meantime, countries must sustain strong immunization systems to ensure demand for services and systems capable of distributing a vaccine once it is available."

The Advisor welcomes comments on its Q&A section. Readers can write editor Gene Kuleta at gkuleta@thedialogue.org.

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