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FEATURED Q&A

Is Latin America Ready to Distribute a Covid-19 Vaccine?



Several Latin American countries are participating in trials for potential vaccines against Covid-19. // File Photo: Sam Moqadam via Unsplash.com.

Q Several countries in the region, including Chile, Colombia and Peru, have announced their participation in Phase 3 trials of potential vaccines against Covid-19 that are currently under development by international pharmaceutical companies. Meanwhile, Argentina and Mexico have said they will produce between 150 million and 250 million doses of a potential vaccine at no profit for distribution in the region. How are countries in Latin America and the Caribbean preparing for the eventual distribution of a Covid-19 vaccine? Are their preparations enough to ensure the vaccine reaches the region's most vulnerable populations? How will governments pay for access to and distribution of a vaccine once it becomes available?

A Alejandro Gaviria Uribe, president of Universidad de los Andes and former minister of health and social protection in Colombia: "Latin American countries have some of the best vaccination programs in the world. Most countries have eliminated some infectious diseases by means of sustained efforts in vaccinations. Measles, for example, was eliminated in 2016 after a 22-year effort involving mass vaccination. However, mass vaccination against Covid-19 will pose some formidable challenges—financial, operative and social. The planned rollout of Covid-19 vaccines will be of an unprecedented scale and complexity, and it will surpass all previous efforts by various orders of magnitude. In Colombia, for example, some government advisors have mentioned that 30 million people will be vaccinated (60 percent of the population). But fewer than two million people were vaccinated annually during the previous decade. Three elements are crucial for the

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A Bolivian court ruled that former President Evo Morales cannot run for Senate in the country's October election on the grounds that he lives in Argentina.

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Hochschild Mining lowered its production forecasts for its mines in Argentina and Peru due to "operational stoppages" and "temporary delays."

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Venezuela's Guaidó Reiterates Call for Boycott of Election

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó announced a "unity pact" with dozens of political parties, calling for a boycott of this December's legislative election.

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Guaidó // File Photo: @jguaido via Twitter.

POLITICAL NEWS

Bolivian Court Rules Morales Cannot Run for Senate Seat

A Bolivian court ruled on Monday that former president Evo Morales cannot run for a seat in the country's Senate, upholding a decision that the country's electoral tribunal made in February, Reuters reported. Morales, who was Bolivia's president for 14 years, stepped down last November amid widespread protests over the country's disputed election. He now lives



Morales // File Photo: Bolivian Government.

in exile in Argentina. In ruling against Morales' attempt to run for Senate in this October's election, Judge Alfredo Jaimes told local media that Morales does not meet the residency requirements. The decision cannot be appealed, Reuters reported. "They denied protection to Evo Morales; democracy won," said attorney Williams Barscope, a member of the judicial team who examined the constitutional protections that Morales' lawyers presented, Agence France-Presse reported. "Evo Morales cannot be a candidate for senator because he lives in Argentina." On Monday night, Morales called the ruling an "illegal and unconstitutional political decision" that was made under "threats and pressure." He added, "History shows that they will be able to disable Evo, but they will not be able to outlaw the people." However, Morales also tweeted, "We will abide by that decision because our commitment and priority is for the people to come out of the crisis. We will not fall into any provocation, the people will once again govern themselves, peacefully and democratically." [Editor's note: See [Q&A](#) on Bolivia in the Aug. 31 issue of the Advisor.]

Venezuela's Guaidó Reiterates Call for Boycott of Election

Venezuelan opposition leader Juan Guaidó, whom dozens of countries recognize as the country's legitimate interim president, on Monday announced a "unitary pact" with 37 political organizations calling for a boycott of the legislative election planned for December. Juan Pablo Guanipa, the first vice president of the opposition-controlled National Assembly and leader of the First Justice party, shared the pact on social media, outlining among its objectives "fighting for liberty, democracy and progress," prioritizing the humanitarian crisis and conducting free and fair presidential and parliamentary elections. It also calls for "deepening and escalating international pressure" on President Nicolás Maduro, though it did not provide further detail. Guaidó is urging citizens to boycott the December election amid concerns that Maduro's government will rig the vote in its favor. "Engaging in fraud and fostering disunity only collaborates with the dictatorship," Guaidó said in comments broadcast on social media. The four main opposition parties as well as 33 other parties and political organizations expressed support

“Engaging in fraud and fostering disunity only collaborates with the dictatorship.”

— Juan Guaidó

for the pact. The announcement came days after Henrique Capriles, an opposition leader who twice ran against Maduro and lost, called on Venezuelans to participate in the vote and opened talks with the government to work toward ensuring a fair election, Reuters reported. In related news, Venezuela's National Constituent Assembly, which is stacked with Maduro loyalists, will not draft a new constitution, the body's leader, Diosdado Cabello, said Sunday, Reuters reported. Several legislators had said the powerful Constituent Assembly

NEWS BRIEFS

Two Women Drop Sexual Abuse Complaints Against Costa Rica's Arias

Two women have dropped sexual abuse complaints against former Costa Rican President Óscar Arias, who led the country from 1986 to 1990 and again from 2006 to 2010, the Associated Press reported. The prosecutor's office said Monday that "the two victims decided not to continue the criminal process," which means a court could drop the charges against Arias. There was no immediate explanation for the decision. Arias denied the first accusation when it surfaced last year.

Argentina May Open Borders to International Flights in October: Report

Argentina could reopen its borders to international commercial flights in October, Reuters reported Friday, citing a transportation ministry source. "The president has the final decision," the person said. Transportation Minister Mario Meoni said a day earlier that the Health Ministry approved new airport protocols for international travel, a requirement before the lifting of a strict travel ban that was due to expire on Sept. 1. Argentina had prohibited all commercial airline flights into the country since April in efforts to curb the spread of Covid-19.

Colombian Regulators Order Google to Ask to Use Personal Data

Colombian regulators on Friday ordered Google to clearly ask users for permission to use their personal data, Reuters reported. If Google does not comply with the order, it faces investigations, sanctions and fines, the country's Superintendency of Industry and Commerce said in a statement. Google's Colombia office said it respected the country's laws and would evaluate the order when it receives formal notification of it.

was preparing to update the 1999 constitution. The Constituent Assembly has functioned as a body parallel to the National Assembly since its creation in a 2017 special election that led to international sanctions against the Maduro government. [Editor's note: See related Q&A in the Aug. 21 issue of the Advisor.]

BUSINESS NEWS

Hochschild Mining Cuts Output Forecast in Argentina, Peru

Precious metals miner Hochschild Mining on Monday lowered its forecasts for this year's production due to "operational stoppages" and "temporary delays in mine sequencing" at its assets in Argentina and Peru. The revised attributable production target for 2020 is now between 280,000 and 290,000 gold equivalent ounces or between 24 million and 25 million silver equivalent ounces, the company said in a statement. Operational costs are expected

Hochschild's CEO, Ignacio Bustamante, said he still expects "solid" production in the second half of the year.

to be of between \$1,250 and \$1,290 per gold equivalent ounce or between \$14.50 and \$15 per silver equivalent ounce, an increase that reflects "the impact of Covid-19 related stoppages," including reduced production resulting in higher capital expenditure per ounce, temporary lower grades due to revised mine plan sequencing and government transport restrictions, the statement added. Despite the revision, Hochschild chief executive Ignacio Bustamante said the company expects to "deliver a solid second half of production with strong expected cash flow generation."

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deployment strategy: the massive training of health workers, a large public communication campaign and a centralized coordinating office. This will take time. Capabilities are not created overnight. Most countries in the region have put all efforts in ensuring the availability of the vaccine. Planning has not been a priority. There is still much uncertainty about the complexities and possible pitfalls of an unprecedented logistic effort. Given the logistic complexities, as well as the possible safety and efficacy problems of the initial vaccines, countries should be cautious about vaccination targets. It is not realistic to estimate that hundreds of millions of people will be vaccinated during the next two years. It probably won't be convenient, either. Public health consequences are uncertain, prices are too high and confidence in governments and science are at stake. Latin America should learn from its own experience: successful vaccination efforts require planning, time and robust state capabilities."

A Arachu Castro, Samuel Z. Stone Chair of Public Health in Latin America at Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine: "Latin American and Caribbean countries have three different mechanisms to access the Covid-19 vaccine. First, through the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)'s Revolving Fund, which has existed since 1977 and through which 41 countries and territories in the region pool resources to purchase vaccines and supplies in bulk at highly negotiated rates. Second is through the COVAX Facility, the vaccine pillar of the Access to Covid-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator. ACT, launched in April, promotes the equitable distribution of tests, treatments and vaccines between and within countries through the pooling of public and private resources to invest in scientific discovery and strengthen health systems. Third is through bilateral agreements between Latin American entities

and the developers of Covid-19 candidate vaccines. PAHO has already been extremely successful in the last four decades, negotiating vaccine procurement on behalf of Latin American and Caribbean governments and assisting countries to strengthen national

“ Latin American and Caribbean countries have three different mechanisms to access the Covid-19 vaccine.”

— Arachu Castro

immunization programs for the equitable distribution of vaccines. The fact that 40 countries and territories in the region have already expressed formal interest in accessing the Covid-19 vaccine from COVAX at a flat rate through the Revolving Fund attests to the central role of regional procurement mechanisms such as PAHO's. But to guarantee the right to health and the equitable distribution of the Covid-19 vaccine within countries before it reaches national immunization programs, governments need to ramp up the strengthening of their health systems—particularly of the primary health care strategy. The Astana Declaration and the Framework Convention on Global Health can serve as guiding principles."

A Katherine E. Bliss, senior fellow at the CSIS Global Health Policy Center: "The ongoing transmission of Covid-19 throughout Latin America and the Caribbean makes the region a logical site for large-scale trials testing the efficacy of vaccines developed to protect vulnerable populations from infection with the novel coronavirus. For some countries, collaborating with pharmaceutical companies from Europe, the United States and China may be a way of securing early access to successful vaccine candidates, once licensed and approved. For others,

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some of which have announced agreements to produce vaccines locally, international collaboration offers a chance to stimulate pharmaceutical research and development activities, as well as manufacturing capabilities. Despite reports that the United States, China and other wealthy countries are mak-

“**International collaboration offers a chance to stimulate pharmaceutical research and development activities”...**

— Katherine E. Bliss

ing expensive deals to secure vaccine doses exclusively for their national populations, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have options for securing vaccines at an affordable price for domestic use. These include engaging with the COVAX Facility, which is investing in a large portfolio of vaccine candidates and is part of the Access to Covid-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT), and committing to buy vaccines as a regional purchasing bloc through the Pan American Health Organization's Revolving Fund. As the Phase 3 trial results are analyzed and successful candidates enter the approval

process, countries can prepare for the equitable dissemination of a Covid-19 vaccine, or vaccines, by ensuring sustained attention to routine immunization programs, preparing for the storage and distribution requirements of any new vaccines and ensuring an adequate cadre of trained health workers available to deliver the new vaccines, once available.”

A Dante Mossi, executive president of the Central American Bank for Economic Integration:

“For the Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI), the crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has been severe, and we have provided about \$2 billion in a contingency plan for Central American countries. Our Board at the end of August approved a financing facility of \$400 million to our member countries to finance the purchase of the vaccine (\$50 million per country), when available. We look to work closely with the Pan American Health Organization to seek their guidance and also with key countries, such as Taiwan, South Korea, Argentina and Mexico, in providing the needed finance to acquire internationally recognized vaccines to the most vulnerable and, in particular, to health workers, who are the first line of defense and are continuously exposed.”

LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

is published every business day by the Inter-American Dialogue, Copyright © 2020

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Latin America Advisor is published every business day, except for major U.S. holidays, by the Inter-American Dialogue at 1155 15th Street NW, Suite 800 Washington, DC 20005

www.thedialogue.org

ISSN 2163-7962

Subscription inquiries are welcomed at

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What's Keeping You Up at Night?

LATIN AMERICA ADVISOR

Readers can suggest topics or trends to be covered in the Latin America Advisor's daily Q&A section.

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