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Scientists address vaccine safety & efficacy at global R&D forum

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The global vaccine rollout has exposed glaring inequalities in access to this life-saving tool



More than 2,800 scientists from 130 countries gathered in a virtual forum last week hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO) to identify knowledge gaps and set research priorities for vaccines against SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19.

They discussed the safety and efficacy of existing vaccines and new candidates, ways to optimize limited supply, and the need for additional safety studies. They discussed the impact of emerging SARS-CoV-2 variants on the efficacy of vaccines, the impact of vaccines on transmission of infection, and the need to develop the next generation of vaccine platforms.

“The development and approval of several safe and effective vaccines less than a year after this virus was isolated and sequenced is an astounding scientific accomplishment,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General, in his opening remarks. “The approval of the first few vaccines does not mean the job is done. Far from it. More vaccines are in the pipeline, which must be evaluated to ensure we have enough doses to vaccinate everyone.”

More than 30 million vaccine doses have already been administered in 47 mostly high-income countries. But the global vaccine rollout has exposed glaring inequalities in access to this life-saving tool.

“The WHO will regularly convene experts from around the world, promote collaborative research, provide standard protocols and develop a platform for sharing the latest knowledge in the field,” said Dr Soumya Swaminathan, WHO Chief Scientist.

The meeting concluded with agreement to establish a WHO-hosted platform for global sharing and coordination of emerging vaccine research information on efficacy and safety. The forum would enable scientists to share and discuss unpublished and published data and research protocols to further our collective understanding of SARS-CoV-2 vaccines.