

Sharing vaccine intellectual property with global community could save millions of lives

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If pharmaceutical companies shared their intellectual property rights to vaccines with the global community, millions of lives could be saved in future pandemics, according to a new paper co-authored by faculty at Binghamton University, State University of New York.

The paper, "Pandemic Preparedness and Response: Beyond the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator," was published in *BMJ Global Health*.

To date, more than 6 million individuals have died from the COVID-19 pandemic and some estimate that the crisis costs the world \$375 billion monthly. Moreover, some estimate that the chance of another pandemic as disruptive as COVID-19 or worse is about 22-28% in the next 10 years.

Heads of state and organizations across the world have agreed to strengthen the International Health Regulations (an international legal instrument that covers measures for preventing the transnational spread of infectious diseases) and to discuss a potentially legally binding instrument that would set targets and responsibilities for various stakeholders involved in [pandemic preparedness](#) and response. The proposed treaty does not, however, address international and national intellectual property (IP) regimes (patents, copyrights, industrial designs, trade secrets, and data rights) that negatively impact equitable access to pandemic health technologies.

Nicole Hassoun, professor of philosophy at Binghamton University and co-author of the new paper, said that patents, [trade secrets](#) and data rights pose barriers to increasing access to vaccines because they prevent competition on the free market. Hassoun has published several articles on the COVID-19 pandemic and access to drugs, and is the author of "Global Health Impact: Extending Access to Essential Medicines," in which she proposes strategies to encourage pharmaceutical companies to improve global health.

"Companies can raise prices for medicines under patents and sell them only to those willing to pay the most to maximize profits. Poor people often cannot access [essential medicines](#) and vaccines precisely because they are protected by patents," said Hassoun.

Hassoun and her co-authors, an international team of scholars and public health practitioners across the disciplines of law, bioethics, public health and economics, believe that sharing data and [intellectual property rights](#) to vaccines will greatly speed up the [global community's](#) ability to respond to new variants, as well as future pandemics. In their new paper, they argue for an equitable, transparent, accountable new global agreement to provide rewards for research and development, but only on the condition that [pharmaceutical companies](#) share the IP rights necessary to produce and distribute them globally.

"If the [international community](#) is going to pay for developing new vaccines or medicines, we should own them," said Hassoun. "If we do, we can ensure that everyone around the world can get them at fair prices. Working together with organizations like UNICEF to distribute essential health technologies at different prices in different countries, we can also recoup the cost of investments in research and development for new technologies."

More information: Abha Saxena et al, Pandemic preparedness and response: beyond the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator, *BMJ Global Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1136/bmjgh-2022-010615](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2022-010615)

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