



## U.S. reverses stance, Supports India on vaccine patent waiver

- By Ankit Agrawal

# US relents, says it will support patent waivers on Covid-19 vaccines

Chidanand Rajghatta / TNN / Updated: May 6, 2021, 08:03 IST



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## WHAT HAS HAPPENED?

The **Biden administration** on Wednesday said it **would support waiving patents** on Covid-19 **vaccines**.

The statement has **important implications** because doing away with intellectual property rights will **pave the way for cheaper versions of the vaccine** to enter the market and also **scale up production**.

# **Bill Gates says 'NO'** **to sharing vaccine formula** **with India**



**by Ankit Agrawal**

While signaling its intention to do away with patents, **US Trade Representative Katherine** Tai in a statement said,

“The Administration **believes strongly in intellectual property protections, but** in service of ending this **pandemic**, supports the **waiver of those protections** for COVID-19 vaccines...

The Administration’s **aim is to get as many safe and effective vaccines to as many people** as fast as possible.”

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## *The U.S. Is Sitting on Tens of Millions of Vaccine Doses the World Needs*

Those tens of millions of doses from AstraZeneca are waiting for trial results, while countries that authorized the vaccine beg to have them.

# WHY IS THE DEMAND TO WAIVE PATENTS ON COVID VACCINES IMPORTANT?

At present, **only drug companies** which **own patents** are authorised to **manufacture** Covid vaccines.

A **lifting of patent** will allow the **recipes to be shared** and there will no longer be an embargo — basically once the formula is shared, any **company which possesses** the required **infrastructure can produce**.

This **will lead to cheaper** and **more generic versions** of Covid vaccines.

It will also mean **two things** — vaccines will be **more affordable** and this will be a big step in **overcoming vaccine shortage**.



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# EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF VACCINES

An **important talking point in recent times** has also been the need to have more equitable distribution of the vaccine doses available.

For instance, the **United States** has been reportedly **sitting on tens of millions of AstraZeneca vaccines even when** Pfizer and Moderna are estimated to deliver 400 million doses by the end of May and 600 million by the end of July.

Combined with the 20 million doses Johnson & Johnson is also expected to deliver this month, the **United States may have an excess of over 80 million doses.**

Inequitable distribution of vaccines has **opened up a glaring gap between developing and wealthier countries** now.

This is **against the interests of the world at large.**

Vaccine experts and human rights groups, including Médecins Sans Frontières and Amnesty International, have **warned that the longer Covid circulates in developing nations,**

There is a **greater chance of more vaccine-resistant, deadly mutations of the virus emerging.**

# WHO IS DEMANDING THAT PATENTS ON COVID VACCINES BE LIFTED?

In October last year, India and South Africa submitted a proposal to WTO to suspend vaccine patents for the duration of the pandemic and share the formula for jabs prepared by AstraZeneca and Pfizer.

The proposal argued this would make vaccines more affordable and allow poorer countries to acquire more doses easily.

The proposal was supported by more than 100 countries, mostly lower- and middle-income nations, and strongly opposed by some of the world's largest economies including the European Union and the United States.

World Health Organization (WHO) chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in March called for vaccine patent rights to be waived until the end of the pandemic, stating that **these “unprecedented times” warrant the move.**

Countries with their own vaccine capacity should “start waiving intellectual property rights” as provided in special emergency provisions from the WTO, Tedros said at a press briefing.

Apart from politicians, civil society members, human rights bodies and health professionals, pharmaceutical companies that have the required infrastructure to produce millions of vaccines if patents are waived have been also raising the demand.

# WHO ARE OPPOSING?

The issue of waiving intellectual property rights is **one of conflict between human rights and commercial interests** of powerful pharmaceutical companies.

**Drug manufacturers and governments** in the **US, UK and Europe** have been strongly **opposing** the patent waiver.

This, **despite the fact** that WHO chief Tedros had said that lifting patents do not mean the innovators will not get anything — **they stand to get royalty for the products they manufacture.**

The pharmaceutical industry has been arguing that innovation as well as vaccine quality and safety depend on maintaining exclusive intellectual property rights.

They have been further arguing that intellectual property rights are important because of the money and effort that goes into research and development —

They feel lifting of patents would be a huge deterrent to their investing heavily on vaccine development during pandemics in the future.

When the WTO's Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (Trips) met in March,

The proposal to waive off vaccine patents was struck down by Britain, Switzerland, EU nations and the US.

The WTO has a consensus-based system, as opposed to a majority voting system.

## CONCLUSION

The announcement by US does not mean that patent rules will be waived right away.

The decision has to be taken by members of the WTO.

Had the proposal been accepted at the WTO last year, it could have played a crucial role in preventing vaccine shortage in India and preventing the number of daily deaths the country is witnessing now.

**Q. Among the following options which is not the objective of the WTO?**

- A) To protect environment
- B) To improve the Balance of Payment
- C) To improve the standard of living of the people
- D) To enlarge production and trade of goods



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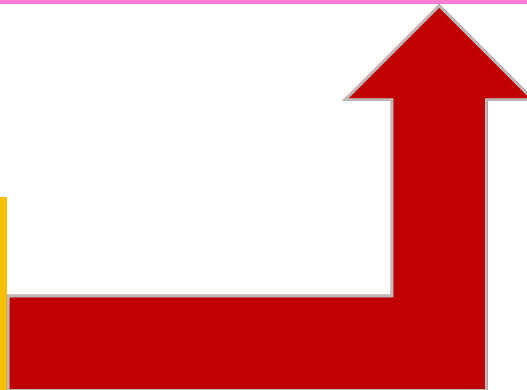
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