



News | Health

Scientists call on G7 to improve preparedness for next pandemic

Appeal comes amid concern strict intellectual property rules hamper the production of affordable vaccines and medicines.



Experts warn the world remains unprepared for the next pandemic despite the deaths of millions from COVID-19 [File: Brenda Goh/Reuters]

By [John Power](#)

Published On 19 May 2023

Hiroshima, Japan – Scientists have called on the Group of Seven to take urgent action to tackle the world’s lack of preparedness for the next pandemic, warning that developing countries continue to lack access to life-saving treatments and vaccines.

In an open letter published to coincide with the G7 summit in Hiroshima, Japan, the People’s Vaccine Alliance said scientific advances made during the COVID-19 pandemic still primarily benefit the wealthiest countries and the bottom lines of pharmaceutical companies.

“It is critical that in the next health crisis the world rapidly deploys medical countermeasures in every country, regardless of their ability to pay. This requires removing every barrier to the development and production of medicines and vaccines – an area where the world failed during the COVID-19 and AIDS pandemics,” the group said.

“Upholding strict intellectual property rules secured monopolies for pharmaceutical companies and prevented the widespread production of affordable generic vaccines and medicines in developing countries.”

The alliance, which is made up of more than 100 former world leaders, Nobel laureates, scientists and economists, said it was concerned that pharmaceutical companies have lobbied world leaders to adopt a “maximalist approach” to intellectual property (IP) rules for [vaccines](#) and treatments.

Last month, pharmaceutical CEOs met Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who is hosting the G7, to lobby for the protection of IP rights amid calls by public health experts for the suspension of such rules.

“As G7 leaders, you have the power to influence how the world chooses to prepare and respond to future pandemics,” the group said. “We hope that you will stand with scientists and physicians in support of equity and the right to life over the right to reap windfall profits from a health emergency.”

The leaders of the G7 – Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States – are meeting in Hiroshima from Friday for a [three-day summit](#) expected to be dominated by Russia’s war in Ukraine and concerns about China’s growing power and influence.

The World Health Organization earlier this month declared the [end of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) as a global health emergency.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said while the end of the pandemic was a cause for celebration, the world must learn from mistakes that resulted in the unnecessary loss of lives.

“COVID has changed our world, and it has changed us,” Tedros said. “That’s the way it should be. If we all go back to how things were before COVID-19, we will have failed to learn our lessons, and we will have failed future generations.”

Nearly seven million people died during the pandemic, according to the WHO, although the actual death toll is believed to be significantly higher than official figures.

SOURCE: AL JAZEERA