



UN NEWS CENTRE



UN News
service

With breaking stories and
newswire products from

- [Home](#)
- [Press Room](#)
- [Multimedia](#)
- [Tools & Services](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [News Focus](#)
- [What, When at UN](#)



[Print this article](#)



[Email this article](#)

Innovation key to ensuring adequate vaccines for all, says UN health chief



14 July 2009 – The manufacturing capacity for influenza vaccines is “woefully” inadequate for a world of 6.8 billion people, the head of the United Nations health agency said today, highlighting the need for innovation in the development of new medicines and in ensuring equitable access to them.

Margaret Chan said the announcement by the World Health Organization ([WHO](#)) last month that the A(H1N1) influenza outbreak had officially reached global pandemic levels had triggered a surge of interest in pandemic vaccines and a scramble to place orders.

The agency’s advisory group on immunization, which met last week, reviewed the current pandemic situation, the status of seasonal vaccine production and potential A(H1N1) vaccine production capacity. Recognizing that the pandemic is unstoppable, the group said all countries will need to have access to vaccines.

“Manufacturing capacity for influenza vaccines is finite and woefully inadequate for a world of 6.8 billion people, nearly all of whom are susceptible to infection by this entirely new and highly contagious virus,” Ms. Chan told the Conference on Intellectual Property and Public Policy Issues, organized by the World Intellectual Property Organization ([WIPO](#)) in Geneva.

“The lion’s share of these limited supplies will go to wealthy countries. Again we see the advantage of affluence. Again we see access denied by an inability to pay.

“But we also see the need for innovation,” she added. “This shortfall in vaccine supplies, in the face of universal need, is the result of limited global manufacturing capacity. It is not, in essence, a result of intellectual property issues.”

The Director-General said that the ideal vaccine would be one that protects against seasonal influenza viruses as well as a range of candidate pandemic viruses. She encouraged the research and development sector as well as academics to work on such an innovation – calling this the “best and most rational insurance policy for increasing supplies and encouraging more equitable access.”

She also noted that the ability to pay, whether at the individual or the national level, remains a distinct advantage. “In the field of health, public policy will remain imperfect as long as access to life-saving interventions is biased in favour of affluence.”

In this regard, Ms. Chan highlighted the resolution on public health, innovation and intellectual property adopted by the World Health Assembly in May that resulted in a global strategy and plan of action to make health care products more accessible and affordable, especially in the developing world.

“The agreement on a global strategy and plan of action demonstrates that the forces that govern the development and pricing of medical products can indeed be steered in directions that favour more equitable access to medicines,” she said.

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[**All countries will need vaccine for ‘unstoppable’ A\(H1N1\) virus – UN health experts**](#)