

WTO again fails to agree on Covid vaccine patent waiver

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The World Trade Organization said Friday its member nations had again failed to agree to suspend intellectual property rights for COVID-19 vaccines, with some countries doubting a deal could be reached unless certain delegations make "real compromises".

South Africa and India have called for [intellectual property rights](#) to be temporarily lifted for coronavirus vaccines during the pandemic in order to boost production and address the gaping inequality in access between rich and poor nations.

However the idea has met with [fierce opposition](#) from pharmaceutical giants and their host countries, which insist patents are not the main roadblocks to scaling up production and warn the move could hamper innovation.

Pressure is mounting for an accord with just weeks left before the WTO's 12th ministerial conference, which runs from November 30 to December 3 in Geneva.

The council of the WTO agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) met on Wednesday and Thursday to try to make progress on the issue.

The WTO works by consensus—all 164 member states must agree to any deal.

In a statement on Friday, the WTO said the council had not reached a deal.

The statement said that some members had "flagged the risk of not achieving an outcome unless delegations are able to make some real compromises."

"A positive and meaningful outcome... would not only send a powerful message of global solidarity, but would also be proof that the WTO has the ability to respond to a major global crisis," those members added.

The TRIPS council chair and Norway's WTO ambassador, Dagfinn Sorli, admitted the body "is not yet in a position to agree on a concrete and positive conclusion".

He said the council will continue to consult member states on how to reach consensus before the ministerial conference in Geneva. Further talks are also scheduled for October 26.

Numerous countries have backed South Africa and India's call for coronavirus patents to be waived, as has the World Health Organization and many non-profits.

COVID vaccination rates are on average 30 times higher in [rich countries](#) than in poor countries. Many rich countries are now considering rolling out third doses of vaccines while billions of people have yet to get access to a first.

WTO chief Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has said the yawning chasm in vaccination rates between the haves and the have nots was "devastating for the lives and livelihoods of Africans" and "morally unacceptable".

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