

## **YMCA calls for COVID-19 vaccine to be freely and equally available to all**

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the lives of billions of people in every corner of the world, and drastically curtailed economic and social activity. Already over 100 million people have been infected and 2 million have fallen victim to the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Yet hope was rekindled all around the world at the end of 2020, when the first vaccines obtained regulatory approval. The vaccination process has started at least in some countries, but as we enter the vaccination phase, we are met with fresh challenges as a global society.

Among these challenges we highlight:

- A considerable risk of unequal and unfair vaccine distribution around the world, with high-income countries occupying most of the production capacity for the approved vaccines. This capacity remains low, and at least for 2021 and 2022 billions risk not having access to the vaccine at all, while new virus variations keep evolving with the potential to impact everyone in the world.
- Misinformation and even disinformation campaigns reduce people's trust in vaccines and in verified information sources. This can lead to many refusing or delaying the vaccination once it is available to them, on false grounds. These campaigns usually spark fear, uncertainty and seed doubt, sometimes with the intent of disruption.
- Production capacity for the approved vaccines, as well as distribution challenges, both of which might lead to delays, and eventually to millions of infections which could have been prevented.
- Lack of available facilities for vaccination centers and vaccine-related information centers, especially in low-to-middle income countries and vulnerable, hard-to-reach communities.

Vaccinating most of the world's population in a record time is something that has never been done before, and it is a journey filled with massive challenges and obstacles. But it is a journey which the world must and will take together, at all levels, from regulators, governments, vaccine producers to civil society organisations and individuals.

As a global Movement serving over 65 million young people and 12,000 communities in 120 countries around the world, the YMCA strongly believes that the COVID-19 vaccination is a moral right for every person on the planet who chooses to exercise it.

We believe that:

1. The COVID-19 vaccines considered safe by the scientific community and approved by the regulatory bodies should be free, voluntary and equally accessible for every person in the world.
2. High-income countries and the vaccine producers should work together with the World Health Organization (WHO) to ensure that low-to-middle income countries have access to the vaccine, including through the COVAX programme led by WHO.
3. Medically vulnerable people, including medical staff and essential workers, should have priority in obtaining the vaccine and measures should be taken by governments to ensure that this is done in an appropriate manner.
4. Every person has the right to accurate information regarding the COVID-19 vaccines, free from manipulation, false information and fear-mongering.

Towards these ends, the World YMCA will take immediate action and long-term action as follows:

1. Development of an internal YMCA COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy aimed at identifying the most relevant and evidence-based solutions for supporting and advocating vaccination.
2. In coordination with the regional Area Alliances of YMCAs, development of detailed internal guidelines aimed at supporting YMCA organisations who intend to support the vaccination in their communities.
3. Support for international civil society advocacy campaigns related to the COVID-19 vaccination efforts.
4. Support for the coordination and promotion of YMCA efforts surrounding the vaccination campaigns all around the world.
5. Where feasible, encouragement of YMCAs to offer their facilities as potential vaccination centers or vaccine-related information centers in communities around the world.

Several YMCAs are already providing important support to national vaccination campaigns, while others are preparing to do so. World YMCA will promote these stories throughout the year on its social media and online channels.

As we move towards what we hope will be the end of the pandemic, the world has many tough choices and challenges ahead. These choices must be made with people's interests in mind, benefiting the many, not the few. If the vaccine is the ticket to exit the pandemic, the right to obtain it should be a human right for all. ▀