

Europe's COVID-19 battle: supply, support and the search for new diagnostics, vaccines and treatments



Europe is now the epicentre of the coronavirus pandemic. In the hail of news stories around COVID-19, it was good to see a positive announcement yesterday outlining the European Commission and European Investment Bank's support of vaccine innovator company CureVac to scale up development and production of a vaccine against the coronavirus. The support, in the form of a loan from the EIB with a guarantee from the European Commission will help CureVac's COVID-19 vaccine development program which aims to launch clinical testing by June 2020.

Many of us have family and friends affected by the crisis, many of us know health professionals giving everything on the frontline. Our collective experience of this outbreak brings a number of issues into sharp focus. While governments contend with implementing appropriate public health measures and health systems are treating or preparing to treat unprecedented numbers of patients requiring intensive care, our industry is focused on three key areas:

1. Ensuring the supply of medicines to the patients that need them
2. Supporting governments and health systems on the ground

And critically,

3. The search for vaccines, diagnostics and treatments to help in the fight against the coronavirus.

In any health emergency from HIV to SARS, Ebola to the coronavirus, attention turns to the research-based biopharmaceutical industry to discover and develop vaccines, diagnostics, treatments and cures. In 2014, Innovative Medicines Initiative (IMI) mobilized hundreds of researchers to fight against the Ebola outbreak and contributed to the development of two vaccines and new diagnostic tests, which helped contain the further outbreaks of the disease.

Around 30 antiviral medicines in various stages of development or use are currently being explored by member companies to see if they are effective in treating patients with COVID-19. Since its launch earlier this month, 13 companies have responded to IMI Call 21, sharing compounds and assets from their libraries in a collaborative bid to accelerate the development of therapeutics and diagnostics to tackle the current and future outbreaks of coronavirus.

The industry research response has been rapid, collaborative and significant.

The type of research effort needed to address a global health threat cannot be created in a vacuum or turned on and off when Europe needs it. It takes decades to build the right research eco-system that can respond quickly to such a public health emergency.

In the case of COVID-19, the world went from reports of a *flu-like virus* in Wuhan, China to a global pandemic in the space of three months. It reflects the changing nature of unmet medical need – and

underlines the critical need for medical innovation to keep pace. Europe needs a research eco-system that can deliver new vaccines, diagnostics and treatments in line with the epidemiological challenges we face.

It requires long-term, collaborative relationships across life-sciences and the healthcare sector, developing and attracting the very best people, access to funding for SMEs to scale up research and manufacturing, an IP framework that inspires long-term investment into our R&D infrastructure and a regulatory system that is stable, dynamic and effective. The right research eco-system is built over time, reflecting the long-term nature of medical innovation which then puts us in the best position to respond quickly.

The EIB loan to CureVac, an innovative vaccine developer with around 400 employees is an example of the instruments available to support medical innovation in the sector. CureVac is a member of Vaccines Europe, EFPIA's special interest group of companies that research, develop and deliver life-saving vaccines. Speaking about the Commission's decision, EFPIA Director General Nathalie Moll said, *"The EU's support of CureVac underlines the critical strategic importance to Europe of an industry ready to take on the challenges of global health emergencies. Our members will continue to work around the clock to innovate, to find solutions, to find new diagnostic tests, vaccines and treatments that can help Europe in fighting this pandemic. We won't rest."*

Quoted in the [Commission press release](#), President Ursula von der Leyen said: *"In this public health crisis it is of utmost importance that we support our leading researchers and tech companies. We are determined to provide CureVac with the financing it needs to quickly scale up development and production of a vaccine against the Coronavirus. I am proud that we have leading companies like CureVac in the EU. Their home is here. But their vaccines will benefit everyone, in Europe and beyond."*

Ensuring Europe can respond to health emergencies is why EFPIA welcomes not only the availability of financing instruments to support promising small and mid-sized companies, but also the general commitment to support Europe's leading medical research companies. A commitment echoed by the Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel, who in the [same release](#) said. *"We are committed to support further its EU-based research and innovation in these critical times. Science and innovation in Europe are at the heart of our policies for protecting people's health."*

In her [Mission letter](#) to Health Commissioner Kyriakides, President von der Leyen asked her *"to support the European pharmaceutical industry to ensure that it remains an innovator and world leader."* Little did anyone know that just six months later, our industry would be at the heart of the research effort to address one of Europe's biggest ever public health crises. President von der Leyen's request underlines the critical strategic importance to Europe of an industry ready to take on the challenges of an ageing population and increased prevalence of chronic disease and also play its role in tackling global health emergencies.

EFPIA is committed to working with the Commission to continue to put science and innovation at the heart of Europe's response to the coronavirus pandemic. While Europe remains at the epicentre of this crisis the industry is committed to its three priorities of; ensuring the supply of medicines to the patients that need them, supporting governments and health systems on the ground and leading the search for vaccines, diagnostics and treatments to help in the fight against coronavirus. #WeWontRest.