

Vaccine nationalism means that poor countries will be left behind

E [economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/01/28/vaccine-nationalism-means-that-poor-countries-will-be-left-behind](https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2021/01/28/vaccine-nationalism-means-that-poor-countries-will-be-left-behind)

28 janvier 2021

Waiting game

Covid-19, when will widespread vaccination coverage be achieved?

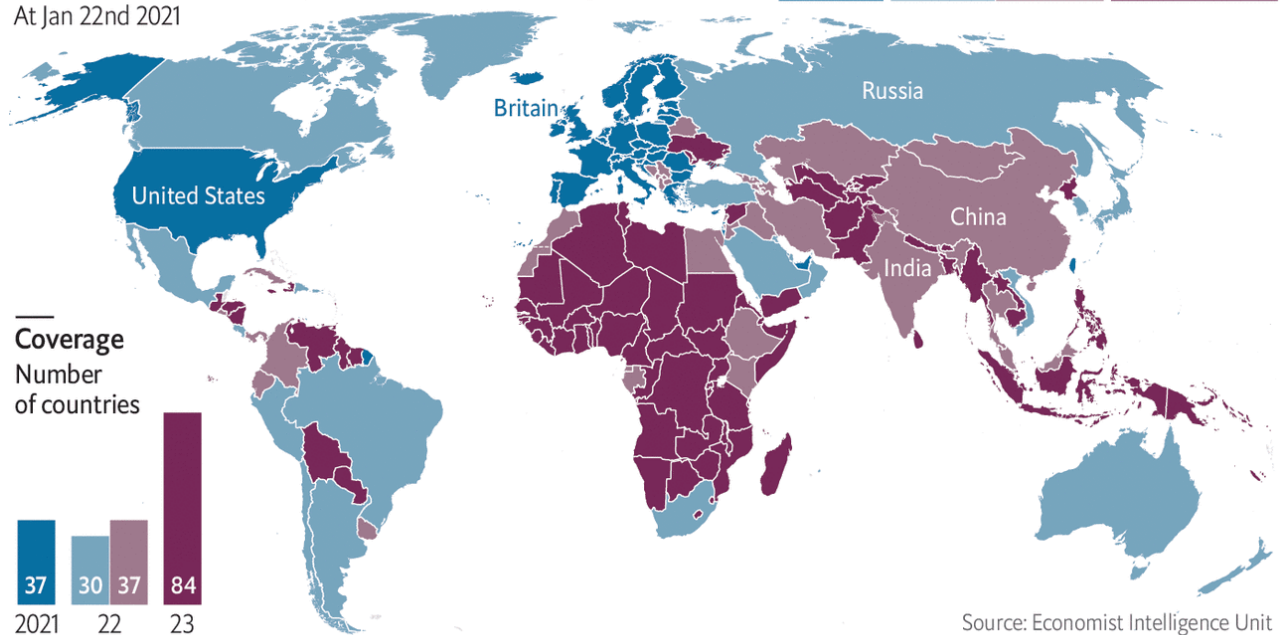
Late 2021

Mid 2022

Late 2022

from early 2023

At Jan 22nd 2021



Source: Economist Intelligence Unit

The Economist

Daily chart

In some, coverage won't be widespread until 2023, if ever

Graphic detail

THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION (WHO) has often been the bearer of bad news during the covid-19 pandemic. It was among the first public-health authorities to warn about the emergence of the coronavirus; it was also early to sound the alarm about the risks of a bungled response. It was thus no surprise when, on January 18th, the agency issued yet another dire forecast. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the WHO's director-general, declared that the world was "on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure" because of the unequal international distribution of covid-19 vaccines. "Ultimately," he warned, "these actions will only prolong the pandemic, the restrictions needed to contain it, and human and economic suffering."

A report by the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a sister company of *The Economist*, arrives at a similarly dire conclusion. It predicts that rich countries with access to proven vaccines—including America, Britain and most of the European Union—will manage to inoculate their most vulnerable citizens by mid-March. (The EU's timetable may slip

owing to a bitter spat over delayed vaccine deliveries by AstraZeneca, a British drugs giant.) Other rich countries should catch up by the end of June. Most middle-income countries, meanwhile, will not be able to do the same until late 2022. The only exception is Russia, thanks to its home-grown “Sputnik V” vaccine. (China and India also have their own vaccines, but will probably be stymied by the size of their populations.) In poorer countries, meaningful vaccination coverage—enough for life to return to normal—may not be possible until 2023, if ever.

There are several reasons for this. Covid-19 vaccines are a limited resource, and production constraints are expected to curb supply for years. That is why many countries scrambled to strike deals with pharmaceutical companies last year, even before the vaccines had been declared safe and effective in clinical trials. Of the 12.5bn doses that the main vaccine producers have promised to make in 2021, 6.4bn have already been ordered, predominantly by rich countries who have secured many more doses than necessary to inoculate their populations. Most poor countries will have to rely on COVAX, a vaccine-sharing scheme co-led by the WHO. COVAX promises only enough doses for 20% of each country’s population and even those may not arrive promptly, as rich countries put off sharing until they feel they have enough for themselves. Once they have secured enough vaccines, poor countries may still struggle with the cost and logistics of immunising their citizens.

Countries that roll out vaccines sooner will of course suffer fewer covid infections, hospital stays and deaths. Faster timetables will have economic benefits, too. The EIU predicts that rich countries’ vaccination efforts will help boost economic growth in the second half of the year. But the WHO has warned that long lockdowns in poor countries will continue to be a drag on trade and supply chains, dampening economic recovery. And continued demand for vaccines will give some countries new ways to flex their muscles. Russia and China, in particular, have already begun to engage in “vaccine diplomacy”, offering countries at the back of the queue access to their shots as a means of boosting their global influence.

The best of our journalism, hand-picked each day

Sign up to our free daily newsletter, The Economist today

