

Company News

# Pfizer accused of 'bullying' Latin American countries during vaccine negotiations

Latin American countries have accused Pfizer of 'high-level bullying' during Covid-19 vaccine negotiations, according to a report by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism published in partnership with STAT.

Allie Nawrat | February 23, 2021

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Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine, which was developed with BioNTech, was approved by the WHO for use globally on 31 December 2020. Credit: Shutterstock.

Latin American countries have accused Pfizer of 'high-level bullying' during Covid-19 vaccine negotiations, according to a [report](#) by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism published in partnership with STAT.

Government officials from Argentina and another Latin American country, which has signed a confidentiality agreement with [Pfizer](#) and so cannot be named, told the Bureau that Pfizer demanded additional indemnity against civil lawsuits citizens might file in relation to Pfizer's [Covid-19 vaccine](#).

Pfizer reportedly asked governments in Argentina and Brazil to put up sovereign assets, including military bases and federal bank reserves, as collateral for potential future legal costs.

Although most countries have offered indemnity to vaccine manufacturers in the pandemic, these Latin American government officials felt Pfizer's demands went beyond those of other companies or the COVAX facility.

According to government officials in Argentina and the unnamed country, Pfizer asked for liability protection not only against civil claims from citizens who suffer serious adverse events after being vaccinated, but also for cases brought due to Pfizer's own negligence, fraud or malice. Documents from Brazil's Ministry of Health suggest that Pfizer made similar demands of the Brazilian government.

As a result of these demands, neither Argentina nor Brazil signed a vaccine supply deal with Pfizer. The other unnamed country eventually came to an agreement with Pfizer, but with a three-month delay, to the detriment of the government's ability to get on top of the Covid-19 crisis.

World Health Organization (WHO) Center on National

and Global Health Law director Professor Lawrence Gostin told the Bureau: “Pharmaceutical companies shouldn’t be using their power to limit life-saving vaccines in low and middle-income countries. [This] seems to be exactly what they’re doing.

“Some liability protection is warranted, but certainly not for fraud, gross negligence, mismanagement, failure to follow good manufacturing practices. Companies have no right to ask for indemnity for these things.”

In an emailed statement to Pharmaceutical Technology, Pfizer said itself and BioNTech, with which it developed the Covid-19 vaccine, “are firmly committed to working with governments and other relevant stakeholders to ensure equitable and affordable access to our COVID-19 vaccine for people around the world.”

“Globally, we have also allocated doses to low- and lower-middle-income countries at a not-for-profit price, including an advance purchase agreement with COVAX to provide up to 40 million doses in 2021.

“Since the beginning of our vaccine development program, we have been in talks with more than 100 countries and supranational organizations, including in Latin America, regarding the supply of our Covid-19 vaccine. We are committed to supporting efforts aimed at providing developing countries with the same access to vaccines as the rest of the world.

“We will not comment on ongoing negotiations, which are private and confidential.”

Pfizer has signed vaccine supply agreements with nine Latin American and Caribbean countries to date: Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

These revelations occur in the context of [richer countries](#) being criticised for inequitably hoarding available Covid-19 vaccine doses at the expense of poorer developing countries. WHO director-general Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has declared the world to be “on the brink of a catastrophic moral failure” due to the stark inequity in access to Covid-19 vaccines.

Vaccine companies have also faced criticism for focusing on bilateral negotiations with richer countries, rather than on signing deals with the COVAX Facility, the equitable Covid-19 vaccine access programme run by the WHO, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

Some healthcare charities have called for companies to share intellectual property and technical know-how to allow Covid-19 vaccines to be developed by other manufacturers across the world.

Latin America has been hit extremely hard by the Covid-19 pandemic. Brazil has the third-highest number of cases worldwide and the second-largest number of deaths in the world, according to the John Hopkins University coronavirus resource [center](#). Access to safe and effective vaccines in the region would be invaluable for turning the tide of the region's Covid-19 crisis.

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