



ASAN

AUTISTIC SELF ADVOCACY NETWORK

Global Disparities in Vaccine Access

**What are global disparities
in COVID-19 vaccination and
why do they matter?**

Words to Know

COVAX

- A program that gives COVID-19 vaccine doses to poorer countries.

COVID-19 vaccine

- A shot that can keep you from getting COVID-19.

COVID-19

- A bad disease that has spread around the world. It makes people very sick and can kill people.

Charity model of vaccination

- When poorer countries can't make their own doses of vaccines, so they have to rely on donations of vaccine doses from other countries.

Colonialism

- When large countries with lots of power take over other countries or regions.

Colony

- A piece of land controlled by another country.

Contagious

- When a virus can spread from one person to another. More contagious variants can make more people sick than less contagious variants.

Disparity

- An unfair difference between two groups.

Herd immunity

- When enough people get vaccinated that a disease can't spread.

Host

- A larger living being, like a human, that the virus changes in.

Imperialism

- When large countries with lots of power force their power on other countries.

Omicron

- A variant of the virus that causes COVID-19. It can spread a lot more easily than the original kind of the virus.

Patents

- Special documents that governments give out. Patents say that only certain companies get to make something.

Vaccine

- A shot a doctor gives you to keep you from getting sick.

Variants

- Different kinds of a virus. The virus that causes COVID-19 has variants.

Virus

- A kind of germ

What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a bad disease. It makes people very sick. COVID-19 has spread around the world. COVID-19 is still spreading. You can learn more about COVID-19 by reading [our fact sheet on the COVID-19 vaccine](#).

What is the COVID-19 vaccine?

Vaccines help protect us from germs. They teach our body how to fight germs. Every vaccine is made to fight a specific germ. They teach our body to recognize that kind of germ. So when our body finds those germs, it's ready to stop them.

Vaccines can keep us from getting sick. Vaccines can keep us from giving germs to someone else. Vaccines can help us keep the people around us from getting sick.

We usually get vaccines as shots. We have vaccines for COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccines can keep us from getting COVID-19. COVID-19 vaccines are shots. You can learn more about the vaccines in [our fact sheet on the COVID-19 vaccine](#).

What are disparities?

A disparity is an unfair difference between two groups. Disparities can happen for many different reasons.

For example:

There is a disparity between the number of people without disabilities who have jobs and the number of people with disabilities who have jobs. People without disabilities are much more likely to have jobs than people without disabilities. This is not fair! People with disabilities should be able to have jobs if we want them.

What are COVID-19 vaccine disparities?

Right now, there is a limited supply of COVID-19 vaccine doses. This means that not everyone who wants a COVID-19 vaccine can get one. But vaccines are also not given out equally.

Rich countries bought lots and lots of vaccine doses. That means that poor countries couldn't buy enough doses. Poor countries couldn't vaccinate everyone. There is a disparity between rich countries and poor countries.

In rich countries, anyone who wants a COVID-19 vaccine can get one. People are even able to get booster shots. (Read more about booster shots in [our fact sheet about boosters](#).) But in poor countries, people who want a COVID-19 vaccine can't get one. They can't even get their first dose of a vaccine. This is not fair. It is not fair that some people can get booster shots while other people can't get vaccinated at all.

What other kinds of health care disparities exist?

When countries are poor, it is hard for them to keep their people healthy. Here are some examples of health care activities that cost a lot of money:

- Getting many people vaccinated.
- Making sure people have clean water to drink.
- Getting rid of pests that can make people sick, like mosquitos.

When countries are rich, it is easier for them to keep their people healthy.

People living in poor countries don't have a lot of money either. This means people usually can't afford to pay to get health care.

What are imperialism and colonialism? Why do they matter today?

Imperialism is when large countries with lots of power force their power on other countries. **Colonialism** is when large countries with lots of power take over other countries or regions. In colonialism, countries establish colonies. A **colony** is a piece of land controlled by another country.

There is a long history of colonialism in the world going back to ancient times. Starting in the 1400s, countries in Europe started to colonize parts of:

- Africa
- Asia
- The Americas.

European countries split these continents up into colonies. The European countries didn't care about the people who were already living in the colonies. The European countries took advantage of people in the colonies. The European countries enslaved many of the people in the colonies. The European countries stole things from people in the colonies.

Many countries in Europe were colonizers. So was the United States. Many former colonies are now independent countries. But their former colonizing countries have a lot of influence over them.

Imperialism and colonialism are a big part of why some countries don't have a lot of money. Today, there are fewer colonies left in the world. But many countries that used to be colonies are poorer countries. They don't have much money because other countries took advantage of them for so long. This means that they can't pay for as much health care for their people.

For example:

In 1804, Haiti fought for their independence. Haiti won and stopped being a colony of France. Haiti became its own country. People in France didn't like this. White people in France made lots of money from enslaving Black people in Haiti. So France forced Haiti to pay back a debt. The debt was money that France said Haiti owed. France was a much more powerful country than Haiti. If Haiti didn't pay France the money, Haiti would get in a lot of trouble.

It wasn't fair that Haiti had to pay the debt to France. France never should have said Haiti had to pay a debt back. But France still made Haiti pay the debt. It took Haiti over 100 years to pay off the debt. As a result, Haiti didn't have a lot of money. Today, Haiti still does not have a lot of money. It is very hard for the Haitian government to help their people with things like:

- Clean water
- Good health care
- Getting vaccines.

What are vaccine patents?

There are many different kinds of COVID-19 vaccines. Different companies invented the different kinds of vaccines. Those companies have **patents** on the vaccines. Patents are special documents that governments give out. Patents say the companies are the only companies that get to make the vaccines. Other people can't make the vaccines.

The companies could get rid of their patents. The companies could say that anyone can make the vaccines. That would allow anyone who has the right kind of equipment to make vaccines. That would mean many more people and companies could make the vaccines. Then there would be more doses of the vaccines. Then, more people could get vaccinated.

But the companies haven't gotten rid of their patents yet. One main reason is money. If the companies get rid of their patents, other companies can make the vaccines. Then, the other companies can sell the vaccines. The companies with the patents wouldn't sell as many vaccines. Then, the companies who had the patents wouldn't make as much money. The companies want to make a lot of money. So they won't get rid of their patents.

What are charity models? Why do they matter in vaccination?

Right now, most poorer countries can't make their own doses of vaccines. So they have to rely on donations of vaccine doses from richer countries. This is called the **charity model** of vaccination. But richer countries don't give as many vaccine doses as they could.

For example:

The United States had a vaccine donation program. The United States was sending some doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to poorer countries. The United States was not sending as many doses as it could.

But then the program ran out of money. So the United States stopped sending doses of the COVID-19 vaccine at all. The United States' government could give the program more money. Then, the program could send more doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to poorer countries. But right now, the United States is not sending doses of the COVID-19 vaccine at all.

Here is another example:

COVAX is a program that gives COVID-19 vaccine doses to poorer countries. But COVAX needs donations of COVID-19 vaccine doses from rich countries. Countries with a lot of money aren't giving COVAX enough doses. So COVAX doesn't have enough doses to give to poorer countries.

Vaccines should be available to everyone. People should not have to rely on charity to get the vaccine.

What is herd immunity?

People all around the world need to get vaccinated for COVID-19. It doesn't matter where they live. It doesn't matter how much money they make. It doesn't matter how much money their country has.

Vaccines work better if more people get vaccinated. **Herd immunity** is when enough people get vaccinated that a disease can't spread. When people get vaccinated for a disease, they usually can no longer catch that disease. Then, the disease can't spread because most people can't catch it.

Herd immunity protects people who can't get vaccinated, such as:

- Babies
- People with certain disabilities

They are protected by the vaccinated people around them.

Remember, once you have been vaccinated, there is still a chance that you can still catch COVID-19. So herd immunity protects all of us. Herd immunity protects people who got vaccinated. We want more people to get vaccinated for COVID-19. Then, the COVID-19 germs will not be able to spread anymore.

We don't know exactly how many people need to be vaccinated for COVID-19. We don't know when we will reach herd immunity for COVID-19. But we know we need to vaccinate a lot more people all around the world.

What are variants? Why do they develop?

Variants are different kinds of the COVID-19 virus. A **virus** is a very small germ. Variants happen because the virus changes. The COVID-19 virus is always changing. It changes so that it can spread to more people. New variants of the virus might be more **contagious**. Contagious means a virus can spread from one person to another. More contagious variants can make more people sick than less contagious variants.

For example:

With the original COVID-19 virus, each sick person would get about 3 other people sick. But with the **Omicron** variant, each sick person gets about 10 other people sick. The Omicron variant is a variant of the COVID-19 virus.

Viruses can only change when they are inside a **host**. A host is a larger living being, like a human, that the virus changes in. Viruses can't change if they're not inside a host. When more people get vaccinated, the virus has fewer hosts to change in. When more people get vaccinated, the virus can't spread as easily. The virus can't change as easily because it can't spread to more people. The virus can't change into new variants.

But when people aren't vaccinated, the virus can spread easily. The virus can change very easily.

So we need to get more people vaccinated to stop the virus from spreading. We need to get more people vaccinated to stop the virus from making new variants.

Why do more dangerous variants develop?

The COVID-19 virus keeps making new variants. The only way to stop it is to vaccinate people. It will not stop on its own.

Some of these variants might be more dangerous variants. More dangerous variants are variants that:

- Are more contagious
- Make people get more sick with COVID-19
- Make more people have to go to the hospital with COVID-19
- Make more people die of COVID-19

More variants develop in places where people aren't vaccinated. This is because the virus can spread more easily. The virus has more hosts it can change in. The virus can change more easily. It can change into new variants.

Some of those variants will be more dangerous variants.

We don't want there to be more dangerous variants of COVID-19. We don't want there to be more variants of COVID-19 at all. We want COVID-19 to go away. So we have to make sure everyone in the world gets vaccinated against COVID-19. We can't leave some people out because of where they live. We can't leave some people out because of how much money their country has. We need to vaccinate everyone.

To Learn More

- Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology (APIC): Herd Immunity: https://apic.org/monthly_alerts/herd-immunity/ (not plain language/Easy Read)
- ASAN: Plain Language COVID-19 Resources: <https://autisticadvocacy.org/resources/covid-pl/>. Includes Easy Read, plain language, and video resources in English and Spanish on:
 - What is COVID-19?
 - What is the COVID-19 vaccine?
 - Variants of the virus (Delta and Omicron variants)
 - Booster shots
 - Immunocompromised people and the vaccine
 - Why you need a second shot
 - Types of masks
 - COVID-19 Community Transmission and Levels
- NPR Planet Money: 'The Greatest Heist In History': How Haiti Was Forced To Pay Reparations For Freedom: <https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2021/10/05/1042518732/-the-greatest-heist-in-history-how-haiti-was-forced-to-pay-reparations-for-freed> (not plain language/Easy Read)
- Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance: COVAX explained: <https://www.gavi.org/vaccineswork/covax-explained> (not plain language/Easy Read, includes video)
- PBS NewsHour: Experts say U.S. suspension of international COVID aid will prolong pandemic: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/experts-say-u-s-suspension-of-international-covid-aid-will-prolong-pandemic> (not plain language/Easy Read)