

# Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Wellcome pledge \$300m to combat Covid-19

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Wellcome this week each pledged \$150m for a total of \$300m to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), a global partnership launched five years ago by the governments of Norway and India, the Gates Foundation, Wellcome, and the World Economic Forum.



Source: Supplied. ©Gates Archive/Sylvain Cherkau.

The pledges come ahead of a global replenishment conference in March to support CEPI's visionary five-year plan to better prepare for, prevent, and equitably respond to future epidemics and pandemics.

"As the world responds to the challenge of a rapidly evolving virus, the need to deliver new, lifesaving tools has never been more urgent," said Bill Gates, co-chair of the Gates Foundation. "Our work over the past 20 years has taught us that early investment in research and development can save lives and prevent worst-case scenarios.

"Five years ago, following the Ebola and Zika epidemics, our foundation helped launch CEPI. Today, we're increasing our commitment and pledging an additional \$150m to help CEPI accelerate the development of safe and effective vaccines against emerging variants of the coronavirus and to prepare for, and possibly even prevent, the next pandemic."

## Immediate and equitable vaccine access

Since its inception, CEPI has played a central scientific role in curbing epidemics around the world, overseeing a number of scientific breakthroughs and putting pandemic preparedness at the centre of the global health research and development agenda. When the Covid-19 pandemic began, CEPI responded immediately, building one of the world's largest and most diverse portfolios of Covid-19 vaccine candidates - 14 in all.

CEPI made early investments in the development of the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine, which is now saving lives around the world. Last month, Novavax's protein-based Covid-19 vaccine - funded largely by CEPI - received WHO emergency-use listing and is poised to help efforts to control the pandemic globally. More than 1 billion doses of the Novavax vaccine are now available to COVAX, the global initiative co-led by CEPI that aims to deliver equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines.

CEPI also continues to work on next-generation Covid-19 vaccines, including "variant-proof" Covid-19 vaccines and shots

that could protect against all coronaviruses, potentially removing the threat of future coronavirus pandemics.

## Pre-empting future pandemics and emergency responses

“The overriding lesson from this pandemic is the need for effective organisations and systems to be in place and ready before a crisis, as well as acting rapidly based on well-established science when such crises inevitably occur,” said Dr. Jeremy Farrar, director of Wellcome.



### Children in sub-Saharan Africa dying of Covid-19 at a higher rate than others

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“Wellcome proudly founded CEPI in 2017 along with partners from Norway, India, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the World Economic Forum following the devastating 2014 to 2016 Ebola epidemic. We learned the importance of conducting high-quality research during a crisis. Since then, CEPI has worked tirelessly, and by fostering global collaboration, it has played a truly integral role in the global pandemic response from early January 2020 onwards.”

“Our new commitment of \$150m recognises the enormous potential CEPI has to protect lives against emerging infectious diseases,” Dr. Farrar continued. “The effects of Covid-19 have been sobering. We urge leaders to provide their support and ensure that CEPI reaches its funding target. It is in the world’s collective interest to avoid repeating mistakes and to help future generations prevent epidemics.”

## Research into emerging infectious diseases

Beyond Covid-19, CEPI has filled a vital gap in supporting vaccine equity alongside research and development. CEPI is currently supporting the research and development of accessible vaccines against other infectious diseases, including the first-ever vaccines to reach clinical trials against the deadly Nipah and Lassa viruses.

The organisation has also played a critical role in efforts to end Ebola, including supporting the development of a second Ebola vaccine by Janssen. In addition to advancing the science underlying vaccine development and new vaccine platforms, CEPI is focused on dramatically reducing the time it takes to develop lifesaving vaccines against any new viral threat (referred to as “Disease X”) - to within 100 days of a pathogen being sequenced. This represents a combination of scale and speed that could save millions of lives and trillions of dollars.

## Global health progress in the balance

“The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed how inequitable access to vaccines can put the entire planet at risk and disrupt decades of global health progress,” said Awa Marie Coll Seck, minister of state to the president of the Republic of Senegal. “Innovative global partnerships like CEPI play a critical role in advancing the research and development needed to prevent future pandemics. Importantly, those investments in vaccine technology, particularly in Africa, can also help accelerate progress against other diseases - like HIV, TB, and malaria - that still affect the world’s most vulnerable populations.”



### Africa: the face of vaccine inequity

Katja Hamilton 19 Jan 2022



The pandemic has rebounded in waves around the world, highlighting the important role of international organisations like CEPI that put equitable access at the core of their mission. Recent data from Northeastern University show that had the availability of vaccines in lower-income countries like Kenya been akin to that in high-income countries like the UK or the

US 70% of Covid-19 deaths to date would have been averted.

## **\$3.5bn funding target**

“The world must do better at protecting everyone, everywhere against the greatest health threats - from Covid-19 and beyond,” said Melinda French Gates, co-chair of the Gates Foundation. “CEPI’s investments in groundbreaking research and development, commitments to equitable access, and co-operation across the public and private sectors are vital in this effort. We call on global leaders to help CEPI reach its funding target of \$3.5bn.”

The United Kingdom will host CEPI’s replenishment conference on March 8, 2022, in London. The fundraising event will convene governments, philanthropists, and other donors to support CEPI’s five-year plan to tackle the risk of pandemics and epidemics, potentially preventing millions of deaths and trillions of dollars in economic damage.

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