Press release

22-09-2020 - 17:43
20200918IPR87419

European Parliament

COVID-19 vaccines: MEPs seek answers from industry representatives

MEPs debated ways to secure a quick and safe supply of COVID-19 vaccines on Tuesday, with representatives of pharmaceutical companies, research , and civil society.

During the public hearing, MEPs from the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety as well as the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy heard from key players including researchers, representatives from pharmaceutical companies and civil society organisations, and the European Medicines Agency (EMA). MEPs highlighted the challenge of ensuring that vaccines are available as soon as possible, while at the same time building public trust in vaccination.

A recording is available through the following links:

- Presentations by the speakers
- Q&A with ENVI and ITRE members 1/2
- Q&A with ENVI and ITRE members 2/2

“Today, we have very little information on the content of the contracts that have been signed by the European Commission and some laboratories”, said the Chairman of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Pascal Canfin (Renew Europe, FR). “We wanted to have more information on the state of research, the commitments made by laboratories, and whether they will be able to meet them. We do not even know how many of these contracts there are! The lack of transparency surrounding these contracts was very clearly highlighted during this hearing where Parliament played a role in ensuring democratic accountability”, he added.

“A good vaccine must be efficient, safe, affordable, developed quickly and able to achieve EU market authorisation. We all know that developing a vaccine is a very complex process and that it takes time. But with the European Union and the world in the midst of a COVID-19 pandemic, time is one thing that we simply do not have”, said Industry, Research and Energy Committee Chair Cristian Bușoi (EPP, RO). “The EU, however, has put a lot of effort and funding into accelerating the development, as well as making the vaccine available and securing sufficient supplies for its member states”, he added.

During the debate, industry representatives from Sanofi and Curevac reiterated their commitments to produce one billion doses in 2021, and the importance of keeping safety first. The EMA pointed out that no vaccine is 100% efficient and without risk, but vaccines will only be approved when the benefits outweigh the risks. Curevac and NGO Vaccines Europe advocated for the liability for hidden effects to be made public, as it is in the United States - a view opposed by some MEPs. A representative from Vaccines Europe also stressed that eight billion doses were needed to vaccinate 50% of the world population, whilst the annual global production is five billion doses. Members also questioned the rationale behind the confidentiality of the contracts signed between the European Commission and pharmaceutical companies, and warned against possible bottlenecks in the production of future vaccines. Some MEPs also questioned whether national legal frameworks are sufficient to ensure this production, and how to reconcile intellectual property with the need to make future vaccines widely available.

Background

Developing and deploying an effective and safe vaccine against the virus is the most likely permanent solution to stop the pandemic. To this end, the Commission has proposed an EU vaccines strategy against COVID-19.

Further information

Meeting documents
Multimedia package - COVID-19
Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
Committee on Industry, Research and Energy

Contacts

Baptiste CHATAIN
(+32) 2 28 40992 (BXL)
(+32) 498 98 13 37
baptiste.chatain@europarl.europa.eu
indu-press@europarl.europa.eu
@EP_Industry