

How might new vaccine technology help us to meet the threat of a pandemic? How do we change our assumptions about prevention and preparedness to meet the emerging data?



Plenary 2 Summary

Existing vaccine technology provides us with the most potentially effective tool to meet the threats of a pandemic, but the real challenge is making sure that such technology is available on the ground at an affordable price point and delivered safely and effectively by trained personnel.

While vaccine technology and effectiveness continues to improve, the very existence of new pre-pandemic vaccines mandates that the global community move from an “if” approach to pandemic prevention and preparedness, to “when,” and “how.” An essential thread of this challenge is timing. For example, if we *do* have an effective vaccine, when do we start to immunize?


Pre-pandemic vaccination of large populations could bring unforeseen adverse events, and such results could cause significant public backlash. On the other hand, waiting too long to deliver vaccines could mean that we miss our window of opportunity to prevent a disaster. In such a case, populations would be hard-pressed to forgive their leaders for being too cautious.

Getting the technology right is not the end of the process; it's the beginning of it. And being able to deliver that technology to people at the country-level is probably the biggest challenge we are facing today.

- Christian Baeza

In order to continue improving vaccine technology, the global health community needs to continue to build its platform for information-sharing so that those most affected by the disease have growing confidence in the global infrastructure for effective and equitable vaccine development and delivery.

While the short-run answer to infectious diseases may lie in vaccine stockpiles and pre-pandemic vaccination, participants also agreed that improvements in surveillance technology and health systems are necessary components of long-term disaster prevention and preparedness strategies. Diagnostics are also critical for creating real opportunities for preparedness and prevention, not just for pandemic influenza but other diseases as well.

Importantly, we must appreciate that opportunity does not always translate into action, especially at a global level. We have the opportunity to shift our assumptions about prevention and preparedness—an opportunity to act early, improve health systems and infrastructure in the process, and save millions of lives. But harnessing the opportunity is the real challenge. 

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