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WEEKLY EU HEALTHCARE NEWS UPDATE

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EUROPE'S VACCINE OVERSUPPLY SPARKS CALL FOR TRANSPARENCY IN CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS WITH PFIZER

The glut of coronavirus vaccines in Europe has led to calls for more transparency in the way that the European Commission entered into its large vaccine contract with Pfizer. Health Minister Adam Niedzielski has called on the Commission to explain how it secured the deal for up to 1.8 billion doses of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine. There have been questions about Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's role in the negotiations, with reports suggesting that she personally exchanged messages with Pfizer's CEO, Albert Bourla.

Vaccinations in Europe have slowed down significantly, with only 1.7% of the EU/EEA's adult population having been administered a third booster. However, binding contracts signed during the pandemic mean that governments are still buying vaccines. The largest source of vaccines is the European Commission's deal with BioNTech/Pfizer, with 450 million doses scheduled for delivery this year. The coalition of Eastern and Central European countries has called for a "new, fairer deal" with the vaccine maker, arguing that the pandemic has entered a new stage where less vaccine is required.

The European Commission is currently in negotiations to try and adjust the terms of the contract. Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides has said that negotiators have "achieved a significant reduction of doses, an extension of our contract in time far beyond 2023, and security of supply in case more doses are needed". However, Poland, Bulgaria, Lithuania, and Hungary have rejected these proposals and called for a "significant reduction in the number of doses" and a rejection of the proposed "flexibility fee".

Source: <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-coronavirus-vaccine-glut-call-contract-transparency/>

HERA, ECDC, AND EMA SIGN AGREEMENT TO STRENGTHEN COOPERATION ON HEALTH EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

The Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) of the European Commission has signed agreements with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) to strengthen their collaboration in supporting health emergency preparedness and response, particularly in the area of medical countermeasures.

HERA and ECDC have identified several areas of collaboration, including intelligence gathering and assessment of health threats relevant to medical countermeasures, promoting research and development of medical countermeasures and related technologies, and strengthening knowledge in preparedness and response related to medical countermeasures. Meanwhile, HERA and EMA will work together in assessing serious cross-border threats to health, identifying medical countermeasures and priority research areas, and coordinating in the event of a public health emergency.

The agreements signed with ECDC and EMA aim to ensure the exchange of information on threat assessment, advanced research and development, and other priorities relevant for medical countermeasures. The Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) will be kept informed of all relevant activities carried out under these working arrangements that fall under its mandate. By strengthening their coordination, HERA, ECDC, and EMA are expected to help reinforce the global health emergency preparedness and response architecture.

Source: https://health.ec.europa.eu/latest-updates/hera-signs-agreement-ecdc-and-ema-strengthen-cooperation-health-emergency-preparedness-and-response-2023-03-14_en

WHO WARNS ABOUT INCREASED HEALTHCARE WORKER MIGRATION TO RICH COUNTRIES FOLLOWING THE PANDEMIC

The World Health Organization (WHO) has warned that eight more countries in the global south have dangerously low numbers of healthcare workers in the wake of the COVID pandemic, according to its 2023 report on “Health workforce support and safeguards”. The report found that some 55 countries now rank below the global median in terms of their density of doctors, nurses and midwives per capita, compared to 47 countries in 2020.

The negative health, economic and social impacts of COVID-19, coupled with the increased demand for healthcare workers in high-income countries, likely helped trigger more outward migration of healthcare workers from countries that are already suffering from low health workforce densities, the report found. The outward migration of healthcare workers from low or middle income countries in search of better wages and working conditions is a longstanding issue, which has only become more serious as the global workforce becomes more mobile generally.

Among the countries that recently joined the list of those with vulnerable health workforces are Rwanda, Comoros, Zambia and Zimbabwe in the African region; Timor-Leste in the South-East Asia region; and Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Samoa and Tuvalu in the Western Pacific region of the WHO. The WHO also recommends that healthcare worker migration agreements signed between two governments should explicitly ensure that benefits to the source country are “commensurate and proportionate” to the benefits accrued by the healthcare system of the destination country.

Source: <https://healthpolicy-watch.news/china-dismisses-fbi-chiefs-claim-that-covid-19-most-likely-originated-from-lab-leak/>

Thank you for your attention!

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