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WEEKLY EU HEALTHCARE NEWS UPDATE

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19 EU COUNTRIES UNITE TO COMBAT DRUG SHORTAGES

A group of 19 Member States including Belgium, France, Germany, and Spain, are collaborating to develop a framework for reducing the EU's reliance on outside countries for its drug supply chain.

The initiative follows the European Commission's recent proposal for an overhaul of the EU's drug legislation. The position paper urges the EU to take more drastic steps to improve the security of Europe's supply of medicines, as reliance on external manufacturers can cause supply shortages. The countries point out that over 40% of global active pharmaceutical ingredients came from China in 2019 and that Europe and the rest of the world are dependent on a few manufacturers for a large bulk of their medicines supply.

The proposed European Critical Medicine Act aims to support European "green, digital" manufacturing for essential medications and ingredients. The act should be viewed as complementary to the proposed pharma legislation and a toolbox of different instruments, according to the position paper. The countries are pushing officials to develop a list of critical medicines and map out the entire global supply chain for those drugs to identify potential weaknesses and act quickly in case shortages do arise.

In addition to developing a framework for a secure medicines supply, late last month, European officials proposed updates to the bloc's pharma regulations, which cover issues such as regulatory timelines, length of market exclusivity, and transparency around R&D funding. The member states also suggested a "solidarity mechanism" in which countries affected by shortages can seek temporary relief from other participating countries.

Source: <https://www.businessworld.in/article/EU-States-Seek-To-Reduce-Dependency-On-China-For-Pharmaceuticals/04-05-2023-475358/>

POLAND URGES PFIZER TO RENEGOTIATE COVID-19 VACCINES CONTRACT WITH EU

Health Minister Adam Niedzielski calls for more favorable terms to avoid excess doses.

Poland's health minister, Adam Niedzielski, has written a public letter to Pfizer shareholders, calling the company to renegotiate its COVID-19 vaccine contract with the EU. The minister urged Pfizer to come to more favorable terms to lower the total amount of doses and spread them out over a longer time period, citing the excess doses that have expired unused in warehouses across the EU. The EU's largest vaccine contract is for 1.1 billion doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine, and the deal locks the EU into buying nearly half a billion doses this year.

Poland has been leading efforts to reopen the contract, which was signed at the height of the pandemic, as vaccination rates have fallen off. The European Commission is trying to renegotiate the contract's terms, and the proposal under discussion would see some doses canceled, but with a higher price per dose for the remaining deliveries, creating a "cancellation fee" in practice.

Pfizer's largest shareholders, including SSgA Funds Management, Vanguard Group, and Wellington Management, have previously been urged to pressure the company to allow a more equitable global distribution of the vaccine. However, Pfizer has not yet commented on Poland's request to renegotiate the EU contract. In the letter, Niedzielski accused Pfizer of wanting to make money from funds allocated by EU member states solely for the protection of public health, rather than showing solidarity.

Source: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/poland-asks-pfizer-to-renegotiate-vaccine-deal/>

WHO EXPERTS TO ASSESS WHETHER THE WORLD IS READY TO END COVID EMERGENCY

Global health experts to decide on the status of COVID-19 emergency under the WHO rules.

A panel of global health experts started their meeting Thursday, aiming to determine whether COVID-19 is still considered an emergency under the World Health Organization's rules. The decision helps maintain international focus on the pandemic. The WHO gave COVID-19 its highest level of alert on January 30, 2020, and the panel has continuously applied the label in meetings held every three months. However, several countries such as the United States have started lifting their domestic states of emergency.

WHO Director-General, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, hopes to end the international emergency this year. A final decision is expected in the coming days. Although there is no consensus yet on which way the panel may rule, some experts believe it is time to live with COVID-19 as an ongoing health threat like HIV or tuberculosis. Others argue that lifting the "public health emergency of international concern" (PHEIC) label could impact global funding or collaboration efforts. If the PHEIC label is lifted, some health experts fear that there could be complacency with weaker surveillance and falling vaccination levels. However, all experts agree that the decision should be communicated effectively to highlight that COVID-19 remains a complex public health challenge.

Source: <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/who-experts-weigh-up-whether-world-ready-end-covid-emergency-2023-05-04/>

Thank you for your attention!

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