

COVID-19: Medicines for Europe statement on air freight of critical medicines & supplies

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The grounding of airlines and restrictions at airports in Europe and the world undermine the ability of the generic pharmaceutical industry, which accounts for almost 70% of medicines for patients in Europe, to continue to manufacture and supply. Suspending air freight blocks supply chains, which must stay open to ensure medicines can be manufactured and get to hospitals and patients as we continue to fight the COVID19 outbreak.

Air freight is a crucial part of the pharmaceutical supply chain. Pharmaceutical manufacturers rely on capacity in passenger flights to move medicines and ingredients rapidly and securely. With the spread of COVID-19, we have seen a dramatic reduction in passenger flights that normally carry pharmaceutical goods. There needs to be coordination between the European Commission, Governments, air carriers, logistics operators (freight forwarders) and the pharmaceutical industry to ensure that we can continue to produce and ship medicines to where they are needed.

Quick action to coordinate all supply chain actors, governments and regulators is vital to keep ahead of the curve and avoid severe shortages in the supply of medicines during these critical times. Authorities should create dedicated hubs in the EU to be the receiving point of air freight of medicines, active pharmaceutical ingredients, intermediates, key starting materials and medical equipment in sufficient capacity to cover the needs of the supply chain, and similar provision in countries such as India which are major exporters of medicines to the EU. Due to the globality of supply chains; we seek an integrated international approach to air freight for essential medicines.

Medicines for Europe calls to:

- Maintain air freight capacity by making use of available commercial aircraft not currently in use or banned from flying. Military planes could also be considered for use for essential medicines.
- Ensure that airports remain open inside and outside Europe for these essential goods.
- Coordinate the approach to maintain the airport traffic flowing in EU and other global pharmaceutical hubs (like India, US and China) – creating open routes or “Green lanes” between EU and third countries, and within those countries, for these essential goods.

- Carefully manage the ambient and cold-chain warehouse capacity in inbound and outbound airports and, if necessary, introduce emergency or self-certification of additional capacity for pharmaceutical products.
- Prepare for an increase in demand and need for additional air cargo capacity for pharmaceuticals normally shipped by maritime routes caused by increased demand for medicines.
- Prevent pilots and crew from being unnecessarily quarantined when they fly to and from risk areas through appropriate measures to avoid the spread of Covid-19.
- Coordinate the air freight of medicines and related supplies, aligning on emergency imports with freight forwarders and as necessary with airlines. This may require derogations from competition law to enable individual operators to be designated to perform or coordinate these functions on behalf of all.
- Ensure that aircraft capacity is ring fenced for medicines and pharmaceutical ingredients or subsidise pharmaceutical freight forwarders and generic manufacturers so they can compete with other industries taking up the existing capacity at sky-rocketing prices.

To achieve this, we need immediate discussion and agreement between the relevant actors: the generic medicines industry, freight forwarders, the airline industry and transport/interior ministers, together with the appropriate regulators (aviation, medicines and competition), to achieve the introduction of international distribution routes and hubs for the shipment of medicines and related supplies for their manufacture.

Medicines for Europe and its members are taking all possible actions as an industry to ensure that patients can receive their medicines and we need strong cooperation and coordination with all supply chain actors.

Medicines for Europe

Medicines for Europe represents the generic, biosimilar and value-added medicines industries across Europe. Its vision is to provide sustainable access to high quality medicines, based on 5 important pillars: patients, quality, value, sustainability and partnership. Its members directly employ 190,000 people at over 400 manufacturing and 126 R&D sites in Europe and invest up to 17% of their turnover in R&D investment. Medicines for Europe member companies across Europe are both increasing access to medicines and driving improved health outcomes. They play a key role in creating sustainable European healthcare systems by continuing to provide high quality, effective generic medicines, whilst also innovating to create new biosimilar medicines and bringing to market value added medicines, which deliver better health outcomes, greater efficiency and/or improved safety in the hospital setting for patients. For more information please follow us at www.medicinesforeurope.com and on Twitter @medicinesforEU.