

Global vaccination - our industry depends on it

Back in the early days of the pandemic, when borders had just closed and we were filled with concerns and fears, we were told that it would take a minimum of 18 months until an effective vaccine could be developed.

The labs of the world worked hard — together and separately — to reduce this time, as governments provided funding and then introduced emergency measures to ensure approval.

Instead of 18 months, vaccines were being distributed in nine months — exactly half the expected time.

If it hadn't been for this strategy we would still be back where we were in December and January, but probably in much worse condition, given the extra nine months of transmission. And now, with the exception of the vaccine hesitant, those of us who live in developed nations are almost surely to be fully vaccinated right now.

Finally, we are beginning to see transmission rates dropping and international travel opening up again, with full vaccination against Covid-19 being a prerequisite for many if not most airlines and countries.

The one cog in this machinery has been the Delta variant. In many cases, as soon as borders began opening up they shut back down once this variant began to spread. The worry now is, will there be another variant like Delta? Or could there be a variant even worse than that?

The answer, unfortunately, is yes. Unless we stop it. And it is in our power to do so.

The truth is, we only hear about certain variants of concern, but as a virus spreads through a population thousands upon thousands of mutations actually appear. We don't hear about them or even know about them because almost all of them are not more effective than the original virus.

But every once in a while a mutation occurs that creates something of a super virus. And the more the virus spreads through a population, the more likely one of the mutations will be a "super virus" or "supervariant," for no other reason than math.

Right now, somewhere in the neighbourhood of 50% of the world's population is vaccinated, and most of those people are fully vaccinated. But to protect our health, our loved ones and definitely our industry it is imperative that we now turn our attention to protecting those who do not currently have access to the vaccine.

Approximately 4 billion individuals in the world are not vaccinated. This is precisely where the next Delta variant will emerge, but the next variant of concern may be even stronger, more easily transmissible and unaffected by vaccination.

If we focus our energy and money on vaccinating some but not all then everyone is threatened, because that next supervariant *will* get out, no matter which tiniest corner of the world it mutated in.

I believe we as an entire industry should make world vaccination our number one priority, and I challenge all of us to do that.

I would like to see all airlines add an optional charge to every ticket that allows for donation to global vaccination strategies.

I would like to see the generosity we as an industry are so famous for going specifically to this cause.

I want all of us to understand how threatened we are by leaving part of the global population so vulnerable, and I want us to do something about it, without hesitation.

TFWA, DFWC, WiTR, IATA, all the other industry associations and all retailers and brands, I urge you to make this a priority in coming months. Please, let's work together to protect not only our industry but the entire world.