

COVID-19 vaccine supply chain and regulatory transparency symposium
Tuesday, 29 June 2021, 10:00 – 13:00 15:00 – 18:00 (CET)

- I would like to thank the WTO for inviting the WCO to the Technical symposium on COVID-19 vaccine supply chain and regulatory transparency.
- The WCO Secretary General had the pleasure and privilege to take part in the WTO event on COVID-19 and vaccine equity held on 14 April 2021 and there had been a number of follow-up actions after that event.
- Customs is an important part of the international trade infrastructure. As such Customs administrations around the globe play an important role in facilitating and securing the cross-border movement of medicines, vaccines and related supplies and equipment, including vaccine manufacturing inputs and components.
- The WCO as the voice of the international Customs community has undertaken a number of actions since the beginning of the pandemic to support its 183 Members in their efforts to facilitate the cross-border movement of relief and essential supplies and to support the economy and sustain the supply chain continuity.
- Shortly after COVID-19 vaccine candidates demonstrated high effectiveness in Phase 3 clinical trials, on 11 December 2020 the WCO Council unanimously adopted a [Resolution on the Role of Customs in facilitating the cross-border movement of situationally critical medicines and vaccines](#), including measures for our Member Customs administrations and the WCO Secretariat.
- Immediately after the adoption of the Resolution we took a number of steps to implement it.
- We developed a COVID-19 Action Plan containing 25 actions and covering the period January 2021 – June 2022.
- We developed dedicated guidance materials - [HS Classification reference for vaccines and related supplies and equipment](#) and a [Secretariat Note](#) on the role of Customs in facilitating and securing the cross-border movement of situationally critical medicines and vaccines.
- We established a repository of Members' good practices in facilitating the cross-border movement of COVID-19 vaccines, which is publicly available on the dedicated [section](#) of the WCO web-site.
- On 2 February 2021 the Secretaries General of ICAO and the WCO signed a [Joint statement](#) calling for open collaboration between the aviation and Customs communities, as well as those responsible for other transport modes and other relevant stakeholders, in order to ensure safe, secure and efficient transport of vaccines and associated equipment across borders.
- The issue of the cross-border movement of vaccines and related medical supplies and equipment is subject to regular discussions at the monthly meetings of the WCO Private Sector Consultative Group, where PSCG members share information about challenges, good practices and possible solutions to which the WCO can contribute.
- We organized a global webinar series to improve Members' awareness on the essential characteristics of different COVID-19 vaccines and their respective supply chains.
- Information to identify the genuine vaccines and medical supplies is being shared through the IPR group of the Communication application of the Customs Enforcement Network or CEN (IPR CENComm group). The IPR CENComm Group also features a

pre-arrival information template through which information can be exchanged between the exporting and the importing Member, as well as any potential transit country in order to further facilitate the Customs clearance of the legitimate vaccine shipments. A Rightholders corner was also recently added to the IPR CENComm Group.

- On 30 April 2021 we launched an enforcement operation codenamed Operation STOP II, which benefits from the participation of more than 140 Members, Interpol, OLAF, UNODC, WHO and Europol. Operation STOP II targets counterfeit, substandard and/or illicit medicines, medical supplies/equipment and vaccines related to COVID-19 and gives special attention to small consignments and electronic commerce.

With regard to the vaccine manufacturing inputs and components:

- So far the WCO Private Sector Consultative Group has not reported bottlenecks in the vaccine supply chain that are due to measures introduced by Customs.
- We are aware that export restrictions are a major impediment to the vaccine distribution effort and our guidance material calls for advocacy efforts in that regard, but at the end of the day the task of Customs is to implement the decisions of the respective government.
- The HS Classification reference for vaccines and related supplies and equipment was developed in cooperation with the WHO and supports Customs administrations and economic operators in classifying vaccines and the related supplies and equipment at the international level, that is 6 digits as per the HS. This list, as well as the other lists of HS codes developed by the WCO and WHO earlier in the pandemic were extensively used by our Members for the purposes of prioritizing the clearance and relief of the essential goods and equipment included in the lists. The lists of HS codes played a role in the government decision-making processes on waiving import duties and taxes and economic import prohibitions or restrictions with respect to the goods on the lists. The HS Classification reference for vaccines and related supplies and equipment contains some of the components required for the manufacturing and administering of the vaccines, such as vials, syringes, needles, but does not contain a comprehensive list of the inputs and components required in the vaccine manufacturing process.
- We continue to be actively engaged in working with the WTO and manufacturers looking at the identification and facilitation of critical supplies for vaccine manufacturing.
- We remain open to expanding our cooperation with the pharmaceutical industry and all relevant international organizations (including WHO, WTO, development partners, etc.) in order to better understand the supply chain of the vaccine manufacturing inputs and components and support our Members in facilitating the cross-border movement of these inputs and components.