

COVID-19 VACCINES: A GLOBAL EXPERTS' SUMMIT

The second of three virtual events focusing on the most prevailing issues around COVID-19 and the challenges to preserve global health.

June 25, 2021 | 9:45 a.m. - 2:00 p.m. EDT



Second event report

Overview

On Friday, June 25, 2021, the Office of the President of Florida International University (FIU), in collaboration with the Global Health Consortium at the Robert Stempel College of Public Health & Social Work, in partnership with the Pan American Health Organization and the National School of Tropical Medicine at the Baylor College of Medicine, welcomed over 1,300 attendees to the virtual COVID-19 Vaccines: A Global Experts' Summit. This event was the second of three virtual events in the Summit series.

Following the success of the first event on February 26, 2021, this second event hosted a panel of researchers and public health experts who discussed the current global strategies and opportunities around the COVID-19 vaccine and vaccination roll-out, as well as the efforts underway to strengthen a robust international response to the social and economic costs of the pandemic.

“FIU is proud to collaborate with the global public health community by providing technical assistance and promoting continued education initiatives such as this Summit,” said Dr. Carlos Espinal, director of the Global Health Consortium at Stempel College, and one of the Summit’s key scientific leaders and organizers.

Dr. Tomás R. Guilarte, dean of Stempel College, painted a picture of the current state of the pandemic. “Although we have made tremendous progress in our fight against COVID-19, there are still people, vulnerable people, who are not yet vaccinated,” he said. He shared how proud he was of Stempel College’s experts for their role in helping to stamp out transmission here in the U.S. and abroad. He announced that the third virtual event as part of the Summit would take place this fall, and that the next Global Health Conference of the Americas, organized by the Global Health Consortium, will take place December 2-5, 2021, in Cartagena, Colombia.

FIU’s President Dr. Mark B. Rosenberg gave the opening remarks and thanked partners, speakers, moderators and panelists, the Scientific Committee, and attendees for joining the event. President Rosenberg highlighted FIU’s educational role and achievements, including the recent news that FIU earned the highest score among public universities in the state according to the Florida Board of Governors performance-based funding metrics. He also stressed the importance of collaboration with Latin America and welcomed attendees to visit the University and join ongoing collaborative programs.

Over the subsequent two sessions, participants explored topics surrounding the COVID-19 vaccine, including vaccination inequalities, vaccine hesitancy, the situation in India and Latin America with the new SARS-CoV-2 variants, and the challenges for public health today and after the pandemic.

The panels were enriched by questions from attendees, including representatives from ministries of health, national, regional, and international health organizations, universities, private and public hospitals, the pharmaceutical industry, as well as independent physicians and health care workers. All of them play an active role in the global fight against COVID-19.

The feedback from attendees showed that 94.5% of participants rated themselves “very satisfied” with the event. The majority of participants (83%) cited “obtaining education and professional updates” as the primary benefits of attending and also indicated that the event was “relevant to their everyday work.” In addition, all participants responded that they would recommend that their friends and colleagues watch the recordings of this event. Overall, the event was highly regarded for its speakers, agenda, technical and administrative organization.

The success of the second event as part of the COVID-19 Vaccines: A Global Experts’ Summit was made possible by the support and engagement of many, including the Scientific Committee, partners, speakers, moderators, panelists, and attendees.

Video Recording Link

For those who couldn't attend, the recordings are available [here](#).

Twitter Conversation

View this [Twitter Moment](#) to see #COVID19Summit21 tweets.

Agenda

This event explored the most prevailing issues around COVID-19 and the challenges to preserve global health through presentations and panel discussions. For the three months leading up to the event, the Scientific Committee developed an agenda involving 12 speakers, moderators and panelists from different countries, diverse areas of expertise, and affiliations.

Dr. Francisco Becerra, regional adviser of the Global Health Consortium at Stempel College and former assistant director at PAHO, moderated Session One. Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove, COVID-19 technical lead at WHO Health Emergencies Program in Geneva and one of the keynote speakers, addressed the present and future of COVID-19. Dr. Van Kerkhove reviewed the WHO global strategy for COVID-19 in 2021, focusing on three main goals: suppressing transmission, protecting the vulnerable, and saving lives. Testing is a fundamental aspect, as is implementing infection prevention, control measures and appropriate restrictions, providing clinical care to reduce mortality, and developing and rolling out safe and effective vaccines and therapeutics. Dr. Van Kerkhove reflected that, to date, vaccination distribution worldwide is grotesquely inequitable. Less than 1% of the over 2.7 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines administered to date have been used in low-income countries, while only 10 countries have administered 76% of all doses.

Her message was clear: inequities are prolonging the impact and duration of the pandemic, and the virus will continue to evolve while we keep allowing its spread.

Dr. Angus Thomson, the senior social scientist of Demand for Immunization at UNICEF France, gave a remarkable presentation on combating vaccine misinformation. He stressed that “public immunity demands public trust” and that misinformation is potentially influencing people’s decisions about vaccination. Dr. Thomson reflected on the value of social listening to understand people’s perceptions and engage them in getting immunized. Engagement strategies demand raising trusted voices and filling in information gaps with reliable and accurate content. He encouraged participants to become involved by learning and applying methods from the [Vaccine Misinformation Management Field Guide](#).

A panel, moderated by Dr. Becerra, continued the discussion on vaccine hesitancy, with the contributions of Dr. María Elena Bottazzi, associate dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine and Dr. María Elena Villar, co-director of the Steven Cruz Institute for Media, Science and Technology at FIU. Among other key factors to increase vaccination adherence, the panelists explored the role scientists, governments, and the media play in information dissemination.

Session Two was facilitated by Dr. Eneida Roldan, CEO of FIU HealthCare Network. The first presenter, Dr. Rajiv Chowdhury, executive director of the South Asian Center for Non-Communicable Diseases Research in Bangladesh, illustrated how India has gone from a steady to desperate situation. Despite leading the vaccine-production infrastructure equivalent to almost 70% of the world’s vaccines, by March 2021, India had exported more vaccines than had been administered in the country. Insufficient vaccine supply, inadequate policies, unsafe vaccination centers and major communication issues are likely the drivers for the potential looming third wave now threatening the country.

Dr. Peter Hotez, dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine, spoke of the public health challenges of today and after the pandemic. His compelling statements on how the world is failing to vaccinate low-and middle-income countries highlighted the risk of infection among these populations by the new Delta variant. Dr. Hotez shared the good news on the potential advantages of Corbevax, the vaccine developed at Texas Children’s Hospital Center for Vaccine Development, which will be suitable for children and infants, is of low cost, and can be produced quickly. In the context of the COVID-19 vaccine, Dr. Hotez stressed the need to confront anti-vaccination aggression claiming that high-level action against these destructive forces is essential to defeating the virus.

A dynamic conversation among panel members followed Dr. Hotez’s presentation. The panel included Dr. Cuauhtémoc Ruiz-Matus, chief of the Comprehensive Family Immunization Unit at PAHO/WHO and Dr. Alfonso J. Rodríguez-Morales, professor and senior researcher at the College of Medicine in Fundación Universitaria Autónoma de las Américas in Pereira, Colombia.

Controversial issues were explored, such as the need for a third vaccine dose in light of the new variants and how vaccination coverage could be improved in Latin American countries despite the U.S. having a surplus of doses. Some of which, some would argue, could end up discarded. These topics left unanswered questions around the dynamic and continuously evolving COVID-19 pandemic.

The event was brought to a close by Dr. Espinal and Dr. Bottazzi, who invited participants to join the third and final event as part of the Summit later this fall.