

To:

President of the European Commission Dr. Ursula von der Leyen
Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Ms. Stella Kyriakides
Commissioner for Internal Market Mr. Thierry Breton

Brussels, 26 March 2020

Subject: The European Union must ensure access to medicines for all

Dear President von der Leyen, Dear Commissioner Kyriakides, Commissioner Breton,

In these difficult times of COVID-19 pandemic, strong and efficient measures to restrict the spreading of this virus is essential. Many Member States have notified introduction of border controls and the situation changes daily. We have been pleased to see that the European Commission has adopted swiftly guidelines for Member States on border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services. With this letter, we would like to ask you to consider some further measures that are necessary in this period of crisis.

Critical infrastructure and medicine supply chains

We would like to urge you to ensure that the border closures and controls do not further harm the health of our citizens. Manufacturers, pharmacies and wholesalers are essential to the functioning of healthcare systems by ensuring medicines supply continuity. While recognized as critical infrastructure in most EU Member States, it is not the case in all. As COVID-19 continues to intensify with lockdowns / restrictive measures imposed by national authorities, it has to be ensured that essential medicines supply chain operators are able to maintain services including deliveries to restricted areas and as such need to be part of the critical infrastructure in all EU Member States. To this end, delivery vehicles (drivers) of manufacturers and wholesalers must have access to all restricted areas now and into the future. They need to have fast-lanes / green lanes / priority lanes open through road closures or other transportation restrictions.

There is a need for immediate action EU wide to ensure supply of essential goods such as medicines to healthcare systems, pharmacies, hospitals and patients. All parts of the supply chain must work together to ensure patients do not experience disruptions to their ongoing medication needs and the needs of those battling COVID-19. Healthcare institutions, doctors, pharmacies and other dispensing outlets need to be assured supply from their wholesalers and manufacturers. Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs) need to reach manufacturers. Medical equipment supplies such as ventilators, respiratory machines and personal protective equipment must be able to reach their destination without any delay. Medicines and medical equipment supply chains need to be prioritized and all efforts need to be made to ensure green lanes / fast lanes / priority lanes are opened and maintained to ensure the continued free flow of medicines within nations and across borders.

Global supply

Active Pharmaceutical Ingredient (API) production predominantly takes place in hundreds of factories located in regions most affected by the viral outbreak (China is the leading supplier of API). An extended shut down of production or restrictions on (Chinese and/or other) exports would affect medicine production. Currently, there appears to be low immediate risk to supplies resulting from this situation due to relatively stable lead times on stock level in Europe. However, production and supply need to be continuously monitored to assess stock levels and potential impacts on medicines availability immediately flagged by manufacturers and wholesalers to maintain supply to patients through hospitals, doctors, pharmacies and other dispensing points.

Millions of Europeans are depending on medication. In order to keep our citizens safe, we must make sure that we can supply at least basic treatment domestically. We therefore ask you to explore ways how production of active ingredients in the EU could be taken up within a short timeframe. This does not only include negotiations with the pharmaceutical industry, but also seek possibilities to speed up the relevant authorisation procedures.

Employees in the medical field

While taking all efforts to protect employees from infection, unless testing positive or symptomatic, workers involved in medicines and medical equipment production, distribution and dispensing need to be able to access their place of work. Lockdowns / confinements and / or other restrictions should not apply to employees working in the production, commissioning, distribution and dispensing of medicines, medical and diagnostic devices. Furthermore, measures to accelerate tests available for employees will reduce the impact on restrictive measures thereby ensuring capacity for uninterrupted service.

Testing COVID-19

The encouraging examples of Singapore, Taiwan and South Korea show that containment of the virus is possible. But this is only feasible if sufficient test kits and test facilities are available, which is not the case in most EU member states. We therefore ask you to do everything possible to ramp up the domestic production of test equipment and to engage in international negotiations with companies providing these tests on a global level. At the moment, this shortage of testing capabilities endangers first and foremost those who fight at the very front: nurses, physicians and other workers in health care.

Yours sincerely,

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