

Amazon Chief Medical Officer calls on Biden to lift restrictions on vaccine exports

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Amazon Chief Medical Officer Dr. Vin Gupta called on President Joe Biden to lift restrictions on exports of Covid vaccines at a Monday press conference, as pressure mounts on the U.S. to assist in global vaccination efforts.

“It doesn’t really make sense why they’re not doing that,” said Gupta, who is also a pulmonary doctor and NBC medical analyst. “I think the optics of some governors posting lotteries where you can win \$1 million if you opt to get the vaccine is cringeworthy when the rest of the world is craving access to some vaccine supply.”

This comes days after the Biden administration announced a plan to ship 25 million excess COVID-19 vaccine doses to countries around the world, part of a framework for the administration to send out 80 million vaccines by the end of June.

The export restriction, often referred to as an export ban, was originally imposed by former President Donald Trump’s administration. The Biden administration continued the measure in February. A Department of State official in February [cited](#) a “special responsibility to [inoculate] the American people ” as the reason for the restrictions.

As more Americans have received vaccine doses, more political leaders have called on the U.S. to contribute more abroad. The list includes the European Union, French President Emmanuel Macron and Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez.

“I think a lot of us have seen the Biden administration crawl on this issue and celebrate the delivery of a million doses to our friends down in Central America, which just happened this weekend,” Gupta said at the press conference. “And we’re scratching our heads and saying ‘that’s great, but we need a vastly different scale on a time horizon that’s much more accelerated.’”

The World Health Organization estimates 11 billion doses are needed to vaccinate the world. Just over 2.23 billion doses have been disseminated so far.

About 42% of the U.S. population was fully [vaccinated](#) by Tuesday, compared to a 0.71% rate in Africa; a 21% rate in the EU and a 10% rate in Brazil. In India, now the global epicenter of the pandemic, 3.3% of the country is fully vaccinated.

Gupta said the worst of the pandemic is likely over in the U.S., though third and fourth waves may still hit certain parts of the country — likely in zip codes that have vaccination rates below 50% and are situated in cold, dry climates.

He added that helping global vaccination efforts is in the national security interests of the U.S., because that can protect against potential variants.

“I can envision that happening and that’s the urgency by which we should be thinking about this issue of tackling the enormous challenge of vaccinating the world,” said Gupta. “And I don’t think we have had urgency at all.”