

Draft – Vaccine Procurement Update
Minister Anand Remarks
Presser for COVID-19 Update
September 22, 2020

Introduction:

Good afternoon, and thank you all for joining us on the line.

I would like to take a moment to acknowledge that I am meeting you from the traditional territory of many nations, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat Peoples.

Let me start today by thanking all of those on the frontlines, working tirelessly to care for COVID-19 patients, as well as the doctors and scientists working behind the scenes to develop better treatments and identify safe and effective vaccines.

With cases rising in recent days, we are reminded of the fragility of the progress we've made to bring COVID-19 under control, and the importance of continuing to follow public health advice, such as practising physical distancing and wearing a mask.

Our Government remains vigilant in preparing for the possibility of a resurgence. And my department, Public Services and Procurement Canada, continues to procure vital supplies for our frontline healthcare workers and Canadians providing other essential services.

We are still aggressively purchasing and importing from overseas suppliers, while also developing a domestic supply chain with the many Canadian manufacturers that stepped up to help in the fight against COVID-19.

International shipments of PPE continue to arrive, Canadian suppliers continue to deliver, and we continue to seek out more supplies to keep Canadians safe in the months and years to come.

From the beginning, we have been working closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada to meet the needs of provinces and territories, and get these supplies to those working on the frontlines.

We have also created the Essential Services Contingency Reserve as well as an online hub for suppliers and buyers to help get PPE to those that need it.

Beyond this, we want to provide Canadians access to the most effective treatments available if they do become ill.

Announcement: Treatment

Today, I am pleased to announce that the Government of Canada has signed a new agreement with Gilead Sciences and McKesson Canada to secure a supply of up to 150,000 vials of Remdesivir—an important drug used to fight COVID-19.

On July 27, Health Canada authorized Remdesivir for the treatment of COVID-19. Remdesivir is the only known anti-viral drug at this time that has demonstrated effectiveness in treating COVID-19 patients.

As you can imagine, this drug is in high demand around the world and the supplier is ramping up production. While that happens, the drug is rightly being allocated to countries based on the highest burden of disease.

With Canada's relatively low number of hospitalizations, we are doing our part in the global fight against the virus, and we have agreed to start receiving limited deliveries this month to meet our current needs.

The majority of the 150,000 vials will then arrive in early 2021 once production is in full swing, and continue through to March, when supply is expected to normalize.

We know that COVID-19 will be with us for some time, and this endeavour is imperative as we prepare for all possible scenarios, including a spike in cases heading into the fall and winter seasons.

Announcement: Vaccine Agreement

At the same time, on behalf of the Public Health Agency of Canada, and based on recommendations from the COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force, we are looking to the future and readying Canada for a vaccine to help pull us out of this pandemic.

These past few weeks, our Government has announced several agreements to secure Canada's access to a successful vaccine or vaccines.

Today, we are taking another significant step on that front.

Announcement

I am pleased to announce that the Government of Canada has signed an agreement with Sanofi and GSK for up to 72 million doses of their vaccine candidate, adding to our portfolio of potential vaccines.

(Placeholder for additional agreements, if ready)

This is part of our ongoing strategy to secure a diverse range of potential vaccines.

Alongside the previously announced agreements with Johnson & Johnson, Novavax, Pfizer and Moderna, this means Canada has now secured access to up to 262 million doses of potential vaccines, to protect Canadians and save lives.

We now have access to five potential vaccines and have secured a guaranteed minimum of 154 million doses. This includes an option we recently exercised on the existing agreement with Moderna.

[Placeholder for investment/costing language]

These vaccines represent the three main types of vaccine candidates – known as mRNA, Protein Subunit and Viral Vector.

Having a diverse portfolio of vaccines from different supply sources will give us the best access to safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines when they become available.

Complexity of Vaccine Candidate Agreements

I will note that all of the vaccine agreements we are signing contain delivery schedules, with the first doses arriving early next year. Delivery dates are, of course, contingent on a vaccine being proven safe and effective, and receiving regulatory approval from Health Canada.

While the process under normal circumstances can take years to complete, expedited measures have been put in place and will help save time without reducing safety, efficacy and manufacturing quality requirements.

However, the availability of authorized vaccines will ultimately depend on the success and data of clinical trials.

Vaccine negotiations are rigorous, intricate and vary from company to company. Elements such as dosage requirements can also vary, and each company has different manufacturing and finishing needs.

We are committed to continuing to pursue more agreements, and our procurement teams are working around the clock to move this complex work forward.

Our approach here is about investing up front in a diverse portfolio to ensure that, as the science progresses, Canada will have priority access to an effective vaccine.

The development of these vaccines is occurring in an innovative yet uncertain environment. The fact is, we do not know how many of these candidates will be successful.

But it is important to remember that investments today to secure priority access on multiple fronts are investments in the future health and safety of every Canadian.

That is our focus, and that is our goal.

[TBC] Additionally, as was recently announced, Canada has become a participant in the COVAX Facility, a global endeavour for the world's more prosperous countries to pool resources to purchase COVID vaccine doses.

This will provide Canada access to an even larger array of possible vaccines, while also ensuring they are distributed equitably at a subsidized rate to lower-income countries. Because the pandemic will not be over until it is over everywhere. **[TBC]**

Of course, we know that once enough data has been collected on a vaccine, there are still critical steps ahead, including Health Canada review and regulatory approval.

These steps will take time, but will ensure that a safe, effective vaccine is available. And when those vaccines arrive, Canada will be prepared.

Just recently, we signed two contracts with SiO₂, a materials science company out of the United States, for syringes and vials for use in filling vaccines. The vials we are receiving from SiO₂ are anticipated to provide filling for up to 80 million doses.

These contracts will prove essential for efficiently distributing and administering a vaccine.

We are also procuring supplies required to manufacture and package vaccines right here in Canada. This includes securing domestic production lines to rapidly fill and finish vials. It also includes buying syringes, needles and alcohol swabs to support safe and effective immunization.

The Canadian component to all of this is an important one.

For example, we have awarded contracts to Cardinal Health Canada to provide alcohol swabs, adhesive bandages, non-sterile gauze and sharps containers.

In addition, Becton Dickinson Canada, which is already providing consumables such as syringes and needles, will also be supplying sharps containers under a new agreement we just signed with them.

And only weeks ago, the Prime Minister announced that the Government of Canada will invest 126 million dollars over two years to build a new facility in Montreal out of the National Research Council. This facility will enable an increase in domestic vaccine manufacturing by up to two million doses a month.

This is great news for the bio-manufacturing industry in Canada.

Announcement: Logistics

When one or more vaccines are ready to distribute, we must ensure that all Canadians across this vast country have access.

Properly managing the logistics of moving the goods we procure during the pandemic has always been an important part of our Government's work.

For example, with increased numbers of PPE deliveries—thanks to ramped-up production around the world and here at home—our Government has issued a new contract to Metro Logistics Inc. to help with warehousing and distribution of PPE to provinces and territories. This increased capacity for warehousing and distribution is paramount as we head into the fall.

In addition to PPE, we know that logistics will be just as important when it comes to distributing vaccines down the road.

Canada has a robust system for vaccine supply already in place to ensure access to vaccines for routine immunization programs.

However, depending on which COVID-19 vaccines are ultimately approved, warehousing and delivery could come with distinct specifications and require a unique logistics solution.

For that reason, we are working closely with the Public Health Agency of Canada to identify additional requirements for vaccine logistics.

In short, when a vaccine is ready, we will be ready to offer it to Canadians in every corner of this country, from coast to coast to coast.

Closing

Our Government will continue do everything possible to keep Canadians safe, and we will continue to take action that will protect Canadians from COVID-19.

I want to again thank everyone on the frontlines, as well as those working so hard behind the scenes to develop treatments and vaccines to combat this virus.

Your hard work and dedication will get us through this pandemic.

Thank you.