

Coronavirus

'Won't share vaccine formula'

WHO group urges 3rd shot for some people

GENEVA, Oct. 12. (AP) — An expert group advising the World Health Organization on vaccines has recommended that older people and those with compromised immune systems get an extra dose of COVID-19 vaccine as part of their regular schedule, in line with what many rich countries including Britain, France and the US have already recommended for their populations.

At a press briefing on Monday, the WHO's vaccines director, Dr. Kate O'Brien, said the group was advising that people who have weaker immune systems "should receive an additional dose" of all of the WHO-approved vaccines beyond the normally recommended two doses, to produce an immune response to protect them from severe disease, hospitalization and death.

O'Brien said this third dose should be given to people sometime between one to three months after the second dose and was not considered a booster.

She emphasized that this recommendation does not apply to healthy, younger adults who have a normal immune response to vaccination and have no underlying conditions. The WHO's expert group recommended that people get the same vaccine they received for their original immunization where possible.

Meanwhile, the United Nations chief says the pandemic has forced more than 100 million people into poverty and left over 4 billion people with little or no social support, health care or income protection.

Secretary-General **Antonio Guterres** told an International Monetary Fund panel Monday that global solidarity "is missing in action" and people living in conflict-affected and poor countries are suffering most of all.

In Guterres' words, "Vaccine inequality is a moral outrage that is condemning the world to millions more deaths and prolonging an economic slowdown that could cost trillions of dollars, hitting the poorest countries hardest of all."

Guterres says indications the world is in a substantial economic recovery mask the huge divergence between the situations in rich countries and in the least developed nations.

Patent

In another development, Moderna has no plans to share the recipe for its COVID-19 vaccine because executives have concluded that scaling up the company's own production is the best way to increase the global supply, the company's chairman said Monday.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Nouraf Afeyan also reiterated a pledge Moderna made a year ago not to enforce patent infringement on anyone else making a coronavirus vaccine during the pandemic.

"We didn't have to do that," Afeyan said. "We think that was the right, responsible thing to do." He added: "We want that to be helping the world."

The United Nations health agency has pressed Moderna to share its vaccine formula. Afeyan said the company analyzed whether it would be better to share the messenger RNA technology and determined that it could expand production and deliver billions of additional doses in 2022.

"Within the next six to nine months, the most reliable way to make high-quality vaccines and in an efficient way is going to be if we make them," Afeyan said. Asked about appeals from the World Health Organization and others, he contended that such pleas assumed "that we couldn't get enough capacity, but in fact we know we can."

Moderna "went from having zero production to having 1 billion doses in less than a year," Afeyan said, referring to the Massachusetts-based company's sprint to develop the vaccine and produce it in large quantities. "And we think we will be able to go from 1 to 3 billion" in 2022.

"We think we are doing everything we can to help this pandemic," Afeyan added, citing the company's increasing output and its pledge on patent infringement.

He noted that \$2.5 billion (about 2.1 billion euros) and 10 years were spent in developing the platform that makes Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine.

"Others joined the hunt when COVID-19 came along, and we're glad to see that the capacity therefore has been increased considerably beyond what Moderna would have been able to do" by itself, Afeyan said.

Asked how successful he thought others might be if they started from scratch using Moderna patents, he declined to speculate. But "it's hard for me to imagine that they would be able to get any meaningful scale in a short time frame at the quality we would be able to do as a certainty" for 2022.

Asked about recent criticism that Moderna has been furnishing its vaccine mainly to wealthy countries while low-income countries clamor for the product, Afeyan said the company supplied a "quite significant" output to poorer nations, mostly through its work with the U.S. government, which contracted early in the pandemic with the company for doses.

Moderna is working with multiple governments "to help them secure supplies for the express purpose of supplying to low-income countries," the executive said.

"There is more supply in the EU and the US government that they will be able to use," said Afeyan, who is also a co-founder of Moderna.

Separately, Moderna made a commitment in May to Covax, the UN-backed vaccine program, to arrange for a total of 500 million doses to go to poorer countries. He said probably 40 million doses would begin to ship in the last three months of this year, with the rest shipping next year.

Also:

MOSCOW: Russia registered a new record number of daily coronavirus deaths Tuesday as it faced a rapid surge of contagion amid laggard vaccination rates.

The government coronavirus task force reported 973 coronavirus deaths, the highest daily toll since the start of the pandemic.

The country has continuously registered new coronavirus mortality records this month, and daily infections also have been hovering near all-time highs, with 28,190 new confirmed cases Tuesday.

In total, Russia's coronavirus task force has registered over 7.8 million confirmed cases and 218,345 deaths — the highest death toll in Europe. The state statistics agency Rosstat that also counts deaths where the virus wasn't considered the main cause has reported a much higher total — about 418,000 deaths of people with COVID-19.

The Russian government has blamed a sharp rise in infections and deaths that began last month on a slow vaccination rate. Only 47.8 million Russians, or almost 33% of its nearly 146 million people, had received at least one shot of a coronavirus vaccine, and 42.4 million, or about 29%, were fully vaccinated, the government said Friday.

Despite the rapidly mounting coronavirus caseload and mortality, the Kremlin has ruled out a nationwide lockdown, delegating the power to make decisions on toughening coronavirus restrictions to regional authorities.

Some Russian regions have restricted attendance at large public events and limited access to theaters, restaurants and other places to people who have been vaccinated, recently recovered from COVID-19 or tested negative in the previous 72 hours.

However, life remains largely normal in Moscow, St. Petersburg and many other Russian cities, with businesses operating as usual and mask mandates loosely enforced. In Moscow, the authorities expanded free coronavirus tests in shopping malls, hoping it would help stem contagion.



This 1988 file photo shows William Shatner dressed as Capt. James T. Kirk at a photo opportunity promoting the Paramount Studios film 'Star Trek V: The Final Frontier.' The performer who breathed life into Kirk is, at age 90, heading toward the stars under dramatically different circumstances than his fictional counterpart when Shatner boards Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin NS-18. (AP)

Space

Space travel isn't just for scientists and diplomats

Shatner causing worlds to collide

By Ted Anthony

'Risk is our business,' James T. Kirk once said. "That's what this starship is all about. That's why we're aboard her."

More than a half-century later, the performer who breathed life into the fabled Enterprise captain is, at age 90, making that kind of risk his own business and heading toward the stars under dramatically different circumstances than his fictional counterpart. And in doing so, William Shatner is causing worlds to collide, or at least permitting parallel universes to coexist — the utopian spacefaring vision of "Star Trek" and the evolving, increasingly commercial spot that "space" holds in the American psyche.

When Shatner boards Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin NS-18 in Texas around dawn Wednesday, his one small step into the craft creates one of the ultimate crossover stories of our era.

It's about space and exploration, sure, and certainly about capitalism and billionaires and questions of economic equity. But it's also about popular culture and marketing and entertainment and nostalgia and hope and Manifest Destiny and, and, and ... well, you get the idea.

"What will I see when I'm out there?" Shatner wondered last week, talking to Anderson Cooper on CNN. An equally valid question is this: What will WE see when he's out there?

It will be a complex blend of human dreams superimposed upon technology and hope, braggadocio and cash, and the notion that space travel elevates us — all orchestrated by a company under serious criticism for what some call the decidedly un-utopian, tech-bro ways that it operates.

Is all that and "Star Trek" a good fit?

Since its 1966 premiere with one of the most diverse casts TV had ever seen, "Trek" has grown into an intricate transmedia universe full of subtleties and traditions and rules.

Among them: Human beings avoid killing each other. Money is generally outdated, as are hunger and poverty. Greed is aberrant. Noninterference in other cultures is the most sacred principle of all. And within the United Federation of Planets, the spacefaring United Nations of "Star Trek," exploration, not domination, is the coin of the realm. In short, unlike a lot of hu-

manity right now.

Humans first set foot on the moon 47 days after the original series' final episode. Over the next half century, backed by a vocal fan base, "Star Trek" roared back for more and, in the process, led the way in cementing space travel as an ideal canvas for relevant storytelling. "Trek" remained one of the culture's central vehicles for a spacefaring future. Nichelle Nichols, who played Lt. Uhura on the show, was a particularly tireless advocate, working with NASA to recruit Americans of color and women.

The vision has evolved but remained generally utopian, though two of the latest iterations, "Star Trek: Discovery" and "Star Trek: Picard," have dipped deeper into darkness than their predecessors. In all that varying storytelling, though, one constant remained: the notion that human space travel would become a vector of ethics and goodness that elevated the galaxy rather than plundered it.

Actions

Which brings us to companies like Blue Origin, Elon Musk's SpaceX and Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic — endeavors that build their brands not upon countries but corporations. They offer a narrative that space travel isn't just for scientists and diplomats but for you and me, too. If, that is, you and me happen to have a few hundred thousand dollars or more of walking-around money on hand.

Many have impugned the billionaire space moguls' actions, including the secretary-general of the United Nations, and the troubles of Blue Origin's corporate culture are well-documented of late.

But the motives of the Amazon founder himself remain unclear. It is evident, though, that the popular culture of space travel has influenced Bezos deeply. A longtime "Trek" fan, he made a cameo as an alien Starfleet official in the 2016 movie "Star Trek Beyond." And according to biographer Brad Stone, Bezos even fleetingly considered calling Amazon "Makeitso.com," after Capt. Jean-Luc Picard's favorite command.

"The whole ethos of 'Star Trek' showed people who were different-looking, with different skills, working together. We are in the opening moments of something like that," says Richard B. Cooper, vice president

of the Space Foundation, a nonprofit that advocates for the global space industry. "People can look at this environment and say, 'Hey — I belong there, too.'"

Prohibitive costs aside (and that's a big aside), Cooper has a point. Though the likes of Shatner may not be "regular people," the shift from the dominance of the test pilot and the scientist tracks with the populism of our era, where — it must be said — the exactitude of science is being called into question as never before. And as Cooper points out, "it gives people hope."

That kind of storyline — hope, heroism, competitive dominance and an unerring sense of competence that can at times overlap with testosterone — is powerful. At a moment when NASA and nation-focused space travel lacks a compelling Hollywood narrative, the entrepreneurs and their marketers step right in.

"American dominance in space, nobody cares about it. It's Bezos who says, 'We can't go on living like this. We have to save the planet,'" says Mary-Jane Rubenstein, a professor of religion and science in society at Wesleyan University.

"It's the billionaires who have the utopian visions," says Rubenstein, author of "Astrotopia: The Dangerous Religion of the Corporate Space Race," an upcoming book. "The stakes can't muster them. They have no story."

Should we even be colonizing space? Don't we have enough going on here at home to worry about? Aren't there people with problems more pressing than this who could use the cash?

And what if we encounter life that's not life as we know it, and harm it out of obliviousness or greed? It's not as if that hasn't happened countless times here on the ground, in the land that put a man on the moon but still grapples with a history brimming with horrors from slave markets to smallpox blankets. These are only some of the questions that will ascend and descend with Shatner on Wednesday.

Is it a stunt? Sure. Is it a genius marketing ploy? Absolutely. Is it cynical and self-aggrandizing and designed solely to make more money and grab more attention for the world's richest man? You're going to have to decide that one yourself. (AP)



Blue Origin's New Shepard rocket sits on the landing pad after carrying passengers Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon and space tourism company Blue Origin, brother Mark Bezos, Oliver Daemen and Wally Funk, from its spaceport near Van Horn, Texas on July 20. (AP)



Sabido

Merkel

Discovery

Quake jolts Crete: A strong earthquake jolted the Greek island of Crete on Tuesday, three weeks after another tremor killed a man and damaged hundreds of buildings.

The Geodynamic Institute in Athens said the undersea earthquake had a preliminary magnitude of 6.3 and occurred at 12:24 pm local time (9:24 am GMT) off the island's eastern coast.

Magnitude 4.1 and 4.6 quakes that are believed to be aftershocks took place minutes later, the institute said.

There were no immediate reports of serious damage or injuries. Authorities said police and fire crews were checking buildings in eastern Crete for damage and trying to reach several remote villages closer to the quake's epicenter.

"The quake was felt all over the island, and it did cause concern because we are still feeling the aftershocks from the previous quake," Crete's deputy regional governor, Yiannis Leondarakis, told Greece's state-run radio.

Hundreds of people from villages south of the island's largest city, Heraklion, remain homeless following a 5.8-magnitude quake that struck on Sept. 27. A man was killed while carrying out restoration work at a church that was damaged in the area. Residents whose homes were damaged were moved to hotels and tents set up by the army. (AP)



'Step up on climate': Dozens of large German companies have urged the country's next government to put in place ambitious policies to meet the goals of the 2015 Paris climate accord.

The 69 companies said in an open letter Monday that the next government needs to put Germany "on a clear and reliable path to climate neutrality" with a plan for doing so within its first 100 days in office.

The signatories included chemicals company Bayer, steelmaker ThyssenKrupp and sportswear firm Puma.

The center-left Social Democrats narrowly beat outgoing Chancellor **Angela Merkel's** conservative Union bloc in an election last month.

"Climate protection was the decisive topic in the federal election and the parties must place it at the top of their agenda in building the new federal government," said Michael Otto, board chairman of the mail order company Otto Group and president of the Foundation 2 Degrees, which organized the letter.

Keeping global warming well below 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) — ideally no more than 1.5 degrees C (2.7 degrees F) — by the end of the century is a key goal of the Paris accord.

Earlier this year, Merkel's government adopted a plan to reduce the country's greenhouse gas emissions to "net zero" by 2045, five years earlier than previously planned.

But official figures show that Germany is slipping behind on its ambitions for cutting greenhouse gases, with 2021 emissions forecast to rebound sharply after a

pandemic-related economic slump.

"They want climate ambition, just as long as it doesn't get in the way of their profits," said **Pascoe Sabido**, a researcher



In this July 31, 2020, file photo, Romelia Navarro, 64, weeps while hugging her husband, Antonio, in his final moments in a COVID-19 unit at St. Jude Medical Center in Fullerton, Calif. On Monday, Oct. 11, 2021, California's coronavirus death toll reached 70,000. (AP)

at the Corporate Europe Observatory, which investigates business lobbying at the European Union level. (AP)



Climate protests near parliament: Hundreds of protesters from climate group Extinction Rebellion blocked a busy intersection Monday near the temporary home of the Netherlands' parliament, marking the start of a week of protests the group plans in The Hague before a UN climate conference that opens on Oct. 31.

The demonstration started when protesters wheeled a yellow boat emblazoned with the Dutch words meaning "citizens decide" into the middle of the road. Other protesters walked to another nearby intersection and began sitting or lying down in the road as police looked on.

Police later said they arrested more than 60 activists who ignored police orders to leave three different locations in the city, saying in a tweet they were causing a dangerous traffic situation.

A journalist covering the demonstration for the De Volkskrant newspaper was among those detained, the newspaper reported.

As the protest started, one man sat on a traffic island in the middle of the road holding a sign saying in Dutch "This is a dead end road," while others parked a truck blocking the road. A woman held a sign saying: "Planet before profit." (AP)