

Europe Faces a Critical Time of Key Medicine Shortages Amidst a Pandemic

Medicine shortages constitute a cross-border health threat that can have serious consequences for the lives and wellbeing of patients across Europe. Although shortages in countries like the [Netherlands are nothing](#) new and despite promises of governments of measures to avoid supply disruptions, citizens are still forced to swap products or, in worst cases, when there is no available therapeutic alternative, go without treatment.

COVID-19 has laid bare the contradictions and shortcomings affecting not only the research and development (R&D) model, but also the whole fabric of healthcare, with public health systems in wealthy countries put to a test like never before. It is in this context that new episodes of medicine shortages are currently being reported. Right now, in the news, we're hearing of shortages of Gilead's Remdesivir, a moderately effective medicine for COVID-19 which, it seems, is in low supply in [the Netherlands](#) and other European countries, such as [Spain](#) and the [United Kingdom](#).

As in other episodes of medicine shortages, lack of access to an essential medicine in a pandemic cannot be attributed to an accident or coincidence, but to specific actions taken by the company holding exclusive rights on the product and the action of governments buying entire stocks regardless their actual needs. While Gilead has concluded [voluntary licensing agreements](#) with companies in several countries, none of these are authorised to serve European markets, straining the company's ability to deliver on purchases and jeopardising the supply.

In April, the World Health Organization (WHO) launched the [COVID-19 Technology Access Pool \(C-TAP\)](#): a platform to pool Intellectual Property, know-how and other relevant data precisely to enhance the development and scale up of manufacturing of vaccines and therapeutic responses to COVID-19. Despite its difficulties to respond to current (and future) demand, Gilead remains opposed to joining the global effort to make sure that universal access is durable, reliable, and sustainable. As long as companies like Gilead fail to sign up to these initiatives, we can expect to hear more stories of shortages, along with the harm they cause.