



VIRTUAL KNOWLEDGE SERIES



Tuesday 9th June: 3:00pm – 3:45pm CEST:

Update on the Fight Against Covid-19

David Nabarro, Special Envoy on COVID-19, World Health Organization

Moderator: Wai-Chan Chan, Managing Director, The Consumer Goods Forum

David began by looking at how he thinks our world will evolve as a result of COVID-19: How will society change? How is governance going to change? And, how is business going to change?

He noted that his work on this coronavirus started in January 2020 and, despite all his experience, he has never seen anything like this before. He noted the virus only kills a fraction of the people it infects, but it is a complex virus and people can have long recoveries. It's a dangerous virus and we have to take it seriously, he said. We also know it's not going to go away quickly. It has staying power, and so we need to recognise that life in the future is about learning how to live with this threat. Life will not return to normal, so we need to learn how to defend ourselves, he commented, and do all the things we want to do despite this constant threat.

The virus is everywhere now, but what can we do about it? He said we need to establish defences at the community level.

Maintaining physical distance is key: two metres is the WHO's recommendation. You should also protect yourself and those around you if you have a cough and cover your mouth. You also need to isolate those who have symptoms and you need to look after the old. He said, we need to invest in defence services and communities. This is how we get on top of it. It's not so difficult, he said. Many countries have gotten ahead of it from Germany to Vietnam to South Korea to Singapore. He also called on businesses to look at working conditions and make sure they are not a hotbed for spreading the virus. From factory workers to those who work in care homes and hospitals, we need extra vigilance in these types of communal locations. In the UK, he noted, we're seeing bus drivers, train platform workers, etc, also witnessing higher percentages of infection: these workers are usually low-paid and often from a minority group.

Governments need to treat this seriously and communicate transparently. We need to empower local governments and emergency services, he said. Public health is an area all of us will need to invest in, including members of the CGF. Previously, we'd seen a reduction in spending on the defence against such viruses. It was no longer a priority for governments, but we now need to reinvest. We can't have more lockdowns, he said. It's destructive, closing businesses and forcing unemployment. It's not a choice. It's not health or the economy: it's investing in health to protect the economy. Let's rebuild public health defences and only then can life start again.



As for a vaccine? David said the world has been trying for 25 years to create a vaccine for AIDS. Vaccines are not an automatic process. It may be possible that the world develops one that works, but will it be accessible by all? The fastest he believes we can develop and test a vaccine is 18 months. Cutting corners is a bad idea, he said. We need the safety checks and we need enough of the vaccine. David sees this more like 2.5 years away, at least. We need to get it right, but that doesn't mean we can't enjoy life now. We just need to be mindful that all 7.8 billion people need to work together on this, he concluded.

Wai-Chan than began asking David some questions:

1. *What have certain countries done to be more protected?*

Let's start with the assumption this virus is similar across geographies. When a virus comes into a country, it's small, but the outbreak expands quickly: 300x over three weeks, for example. If you have one or two cases, you don't lock the whole place down, but you need to stop it spreading. Governments need to work to contain it. South Korea, Austria, Denmark, Singapore, Vietnam and Germany, for example, have been firm in their approach. Other countries have scratched their heads and waited. Suddenly, hospitals are overloaded and an explosive outbreak ensues. This is what we've seen in the UK, New York and Northern Italy. In short, governments can't wait to act, he said. The problem will just explode. Governments need to be quick, robust and decisive.

2. *Isolation is hard to sustain. If there is no treatment on the horizon, how will communities maintain social distancing over time?*

The last thing the WHO wants is to ask people to stay home for months on end. We want those with symptoms or have tested positive to stay home for two weeks, he said, until recovered. We're not asking everyone to isolate. Vulnerable people also need to take care, but we can't lock them away. Physical distancing is important, as is face protection, but the WHO wants people to move around. People should make the best choice based on accurate information.

3. *Do you see a second or third wave coming, as the weather moves from summer to autumn and winter?*

The WHO doesn't think this is temperature-driven. It may get worse, as managing will be more complicated during the winter. Instead of talking second or third waves, however, we're talking about a constant presence, he said. Let's not be scared of it, but let's acknowledge it's not going anywhere and we should protect ourselves and understand the signs. If we adapt our behaviours we should be able to avoid another global outbreak like we've seen over the last few months.



4. *How are we sure governments will have the political will to implement the “playbook” to contain this?*

This is where the WHO is quite useful. We’re able to pull everyone’s experience together from around the world, he said. However, it’s a tough time as we get accused of being biased. It’s important people recognise that working together and sharing experiences is the only way to overcome this. He said he expects politicians that follow the playbook will do better in the long-run; people must use the democratic process to demand action. The CGF has also been on the ball, he noted. Consumer goods businesses are key to helping support the right language and he believes customers will repay those businesses who behave and respond appropriately.

5. *What role can the consumer goods industry play to help slow down the disease?*

The industry is an amazing web throughout society. It links and connects everyone through its products and stores. Many products are helpful too, like sanitation products and face protection. He said, if I had a magic wand, I’d ask all CGF members to connect with people and highlight how ALL of us are responsible for working together to beat this. CGF members can also put pressure on governments to develop coordinated, local groups to help maintain defences. He called on members to insert themselves in and be part of local communities. And, as you link together with your employees, he said, you should see them as ambassadors for the right actions. The same for your suppliers. Make sure they’re doing the right things, he said. Your collective reach and interests make you front and centre in the efforts to make the change.

6. *Can you elaborate on investing in local public health?*

In some east Asian communities, parts are broken into smaller honeycombs, and within these honeycombs people know exactly where to go when they feel ill. They can help you if you get ill or need support. And, the more I study it, he said, the more I see that those governments who have gotten on top of it are the ones with this “guardian” figure present in local communities. They are helped by other experts, of course, who come in when the alarm is raised, but having this central figure in the community is the secret to getting this right. It’s not controlling or oppressive; it’s about being able to identify potential outbreaks and responding quickly. It’s not fashionable in the West, but it is in many East Asian countries. They’ve experienced this with SARS, so they know it works. However, this granularity is also seen in some parts of the UK now. Being local and granular is the key.

7. *Do you believe consumers will change their opinion about sustainability given the COVID influence?*

On one hand, we have situations where millions of people are out of work and political stimulus is



key. In some places the cheapest stimulus is the one chosen. It helps, for example, to get tourism back up and running. However, we don't think about the carbon footprint. Getting the economy going, regardless of the cost, is the goal.

The other option is noting we need to care for people like never before. There is a huge amount of individual and collective responsibility to manage this. It is also empowering us, giving us pride in the results and transforming how business is being done. There's a lot of innovation. So, the other side of the coin is saying we're learning the power and value of working together and we've decided we feel good about what we're doing to mitigate COVID impacts and we want to help people and improve nature. This narrative is definitely there and very common with younger people. They do not want short-sighted stimulus packages. They believe we shouldn't throw away the future for short-term security.

8. *How do we know when we can see the light at the end of the tunnel?*

Remember phrases like "the virus is kept at bay" and "the virus is held in check". We'll know because we'll see there aren't many cases of COVID and hospitals are not overflowing. We'll feel more secure. It's not foolhardy. We'll need statistics and testing to prove it. If the numbers are very, very low, we'll know the situation is held in check. That's what's happening in New Zealand and Vietnam now, as well as other countries. Of course, others have more work to do, but this is the point we want to see to know we have the upper hand.