



*The global voice of freight logistics*

# FIATA considerations on the effective delivery of the COVID-19 vaccines

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## Commitment to serve

For the first time since the commencement of the COVID-19 pandemic, the release of vaccines brings cautious optimism of the road to recovery for societal and economic impacts. As deemed essential services, the freight forwarding and supply chain community will play a pivotal role in the efficient and timely distribution of the vaccines. From learned experience in the distribution of personal protective equipment, FIATA<sup>1</sup> and its members are committed to deliver on this critical humanitarian mission in again meeting their social responsibility, noting the specific challenges involved.

## Global coordination critical

The fundamental base for meeting the challenge to supply the world with the vaccines is the unwavering support from government and industry at national and international levels. This will ensure that an appropriate infrastructure is developed and embedded for the complex logistical distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines. What has been demonstrated over the past year is a clear and present need for greater cooperation at a global level.

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<sup>1</sup> FIATA is the global voice of the freight forwarding and logistics industry and works in close collaboration with various stakeholders at the international level. With its unique focus on all modes of transport (air, rail, road, sea), FIATA has a leading role to play in ensuring optimal and integrated multimodal transport solutions which will be crucial for the effective transportation and last mile delivery of the future COVID-19 vaccines. FIATA has been working closely with its members and other stakeholders active in the world's supply chains throughout the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure aligned and appropriate responses at the international and national levels. This includes working to ensure a level playing field that allows for a fluid and well-functioning supply chain, encouraging the adoption of appropriate border clearance and trade facilitation measures, and pursuing digital solutions to expedite information flows and data sharing. FIATA is currently active in policymaking discussions with other international organizations to ensure appropriate infrastructure and legal frameworks are in place to strengthen multimodal transport, building on lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Distribution complexity

The distribution of vaccines is inherently complex due to product shelf life and temperature requirements from place of manufacturer to patient. Integrated process management between all parties at national and international levels is required to ensure the supply chain management meets the stringent requirements for vaccine delivery. Noting the places of manufacture of the authorized vaccines to date, early distribution is seen as having a more localized or country-specific impact. Regional agreements aligned with global cooperation will therefore play a strategic role in ensuring distribution needs are met for those outside of the key distribution zones. This requires all in the supply chain to work collaboratively to meet the challenge of delivery of this time and temperature-sensitive product.

## Seamless delivery and facilitation

It is crucial that multimodal transport systems be appropriately facilitated as cross border operations require a shift in political thought, a concise acceptance of the legal implications as to a product of different usage requirements, as well as regulatory understanding. This will ensure the seamless interface between different modes of transport in meeting the product to patient needs.

The difference in the temperature imperatives for the supply and delivery of the different vaccines will require certain workarounds in meeting regulatory thresholds for the carriage of goods in whatever mode. Prevention of unnecessary delays and meeting safety and security measures will require updated guidance and safety risk assessments. At the international level, guidance for vaccine shippers and manufacturers should be published for each unique part of the different segments of the supply chain. This will include guidance on any applicable dangerous goods shipping requirements to enable the transfer of consignments between different modes of transport.

It is appropriate that governmental and non-governmental bodies work quickly to develop and implement an appropriate international legal framework to support the recognition and widespread use of multimodal transport documents, as the timeframe for these continuous delivery needs will likely last for several years. FIATA is currently working intensively on further strengthening its own transport documents, for example the FIATA Multimodal Transport Bill of Lading to ensure that it remains fit for purpose for in this changed environment.

## Leveraging lessons learnt

Governments should leverage the lessons from the earlier work on the importation and distribution of personal protection equipment and essential goods. Constant process improvement in trade facilitative measures is necessary to ensure supply chain effectiveness.

Transparency expedited border management, together with the recognition of freight forwarders as essential service providers and logistics operators as essential service providers to enable goods and human resources to cross borders is critical. In addition, there will be a need to ensure measures are



as far as possible universally recognized and harmonized including specific permits and authorizations.

Such harmonized border control processes need to be driven and coordinated through the World Customs Organization (WCO) and its customs administration members, as well as other stakeholders at the national and international levels. The following measures are identified as being core to the facilitation process:

- Pre-arrival clearance of goods through coordinated border management
- Recognition of the COVID-19 vaccine and ancillary medical equipment as essential goods
- Recognition of vaccine supply chain intermediaries to ensure expedited border clearance
- Advance electronic report and release status
- Exemption from export restrictions
- Exemption from import duties and taxes
- Physical examination if necessary, to be conducted at the end user's or other appropriate storage facility, noting temperature control and product shelf-life imperatives

Adoption of the International Civil Aviation Organization's Public Health Corridor for air cargo crews and relief operations is advisable, providing for exemptions quarantines, travel bans and (unless symptomatic) pre-departure and on-arrival testing requirements. In addition, the implementation of the Standards and Recommended Practices of Annex 9 to the Convention on International Civil Aviation will be the first mover of the vaccine in national and international delivery.

## Digitalization for safety and security

Digitalization will aid in transparency, data exchange and inclusive logistical planning, all of which are essential to strengthen traceability throughout the manufacture, shipping and distribution process. This arrangement will require the need for government and industry in all economies to embrace technology and ensure cross-border recognition for enhanced data exchange to minimize delay or person-to-person contact.

*This paper was put together by the FIATA Headquarters and reflects its discussions and collaborative work on this topic with other partners. It is intended to provide a set of considerations on this subject, and FIATA accepts no liability for any consequences of reliance on its contents.*