

Community Issues Programming for April 1 - June 30, 2021

WCLH has identified the following issues as significant issues facing our community this quarter. Following each issue is a list of programs aired addressing that issue.

Issue: COVID-19 Virus: Our community is concerned about the spread of COVID-19 disease as well as the economic impact of "Stay at Home" and other mitigation policies.

Democracy Now! "'Vaccine Passports": ACLU Warns of Privacy Nightmare That Could Create "Two-Tiered Society". As people try to find a safe way to gather and travel during the pandemic, there is growing interest in documenting who has been vaccinated or tested negative for COVID-19. The World Health Organization has warned so-called vaccine passports may not be an effective way to reopen, and healthcare professionals argue vaccine certificates may further exacerbate vaccine inequality. New York is already testing a digital vaccine passport app made by IBM called the Excelsior Pass, while countries including the U.K. and Israel have issued their own versions of electronic vaccine certificates. The U.S. government has ruled out the introduction of mandatory vaccine passports at the federal level, but many private companies are now developing COVID-19 tracking systems. ACLU policy analyst Jay Stanley says smartphone-based vaccine passport apps "raise a lot of questions" around privacy, access and discrimination. "We have systems in place already for proving you've been vaccinated," he says. "Is that system so broken that we need to construct an entirely new electronic system?"
Airdate 8 April 2021 8:47 AM Length 12 minutes.

Democracy Now! "'We're in a Transition Phase": Dr. Monica Gandhi on Vaccine Safety & Why You Still Need a Mask" U.S. health officials have delayed a decision on whether to resume the use of Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccine after reports of blood clots in six women who received doses. Dr. Monica Gandhi, an infectious disease physician and professor of medicine at the UCSF/San Francisco General Hospital, says it's "prudent" to investigate reports of blood clots but notes the issue "is very rare" and unlikely to cause more than a temporary delay. She also says it's important to raise "vaccine optimism" by continuing to tout the benefits of COVID-19 vaccines. "Eventually we are going to get back to the normalcy of not masking and distancing. We're just in this twilight period right now because we are not fully vaccinated," she says.
Airdate 15 June 2021 8:38 AM Length 21 minutes.

Democracy Now! "As Global Pandemic Worsens, U.S. Keeps Blocking Vaccine Patent Waivers Amid Big Pharma Lobbying". Big Pharma has hired an army of lobbyists to pressure U.S. lawmakers to block an effort at the World Trade Organization to loosen intellectual property rules on COVID-19 vaccines, which would allow countries around the world to ramp up production, vaccinate more people and bring the pandemic to an end sooner. Dozens of countries from the Global South, led by India and South Africa, are demanding a temporary waiver on vaccine patents, but rich countries, including the U.S. under both the Trump and Biden administrations, have opposed the move. Lee Fang, investigative journalist at The Intercept, says there is a "glut" of vaccines going to wealthy countries while much of the rest of the world is left waiting. "These initiatives that are based on voluntary agreements with the pharmaceutical companies have not worked," he says. Fang also discusses his reporting on the Biden's administration's ties to the vaccine makers: White House adviser Anita Dunn is co-founder of the consulting firm SKDK, which works closely with Pfizer; Biden's domestic policy adviser, Susan Rice, holds up to \$5 million in Johnson & Johnson shares; and White House science adviser Eric Lander holds up to \$1 million in shares of BioNTech, which co-developed Pfizer's coronavirus vaccine.
Airdate 3 May 2021 8:48 AM Length 11 minutes.

Democracy Now! "'Millions of Lives Are at Stake": Pressure is growing on the Biden administration to support a temporary waiver on intellectual property rights for COVID-related medicines and vaccines at the World Trade Organization. India and South Africa first proposed the waiver in October, but it was blocked by the United States and other wealthy members of the WTO. Big Pharma has also come out against the proposal and has lobbied Washington to preserve its monopoly control. More than 100 countries have supported the waiver, which they say is critical to ramp up production of vaccines, treatments and diagnostic tests in the Global South. Ahead of the kickoff of two days of WTO important meetings in Geneva, we speak with Lori Wallach of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. "The big problem is simply not enough vaccines are being produced," says Wallach. "The world needs 10 to 15 billion doses to reach herd immunity, and right now all of the global production together is on track to make 6 billion doses this year."

Airdate 5 May 2021 8:14 AM Length 22 minutes.

Democracy Now! "'Monumental Moment": U.S. Backs Waiving COVID Vaccine Patent Rights After Months of Blocking Talks": The Biden administration has announced it now supports temporarily waiving the intellectual property rights for COVID vaccines, in what the World Trade Organization is calling a "monumental moment." India and South Africa first proposed the waiver in October, but the United States and other wealthy nations blocked the WTO from even opening negotiations on the proposal. Supporters say the waiver is critically needed to increase the rate of vaccine production for the Global South as COVID-19 rapidly spreads in India, Latin America and other regions where few vaccines are available. Biden's support for the waiver is "an incredibly pleasant surprise" and "late, but still welcome," says Achal Prabhala, coordinator of the AccessIBSA project, which campaigns for access to medicines in India, Brazil and South Africa. "The proposal is monumental because what it does is it allows for more vaccines to be manufactured in the world," Prabhala says. "The whole world faces a crippling shortage of coronavirus vaccines."

Airdate 6 May 2021 8:11 AM Length 15 minutes.

Democracy Now! "Vaccine Hesitancy, Even by Healthcare Workers, Means Shots Expire, Variants Emerge, Pandemic Drags On" As President Biden pledges to buy half of a billion COVID-19 vaccine doses to give to the world, many Americans are refusing to get vaccinated, and thousands of Johnson & Johnson shots will expire soon. This week, Houston Methodist Hospital suspended 178 staff members who refused to abide by its mandate that employees be fully vaccinated. We speak with infectious disease epidemiologist Dr. Syra Madad, who heads the largest public healthcare system in the United States and says we must counter vaccine hesitancy. She also describes her own struggle to encourage health aides in her own household to get the shot. "It's been an uncomfortable reality to see that we are now in June and nearly 50% of healthcare workers remain unvaccinated and unprotected."

Airdate 10 June 2021 8:34 AM Length 23 minutes.

Democracy Now! "Delta Variant Linked to COVID Surges Amid Slow U.S. Vaccination Rates as Global Inequity Persists" The White House says it will miss its goal of getting 70% of adults at least partially vaccinated by July 4. Vaccinations are available for anyone age 12 and up in the U.S., but just 45% of people in the U.S. are fully vaccinated, and only 16 states have fully vaccinated more than half of their populations. Epidemiologist Dr. Ali Khan says despite more than 150 million people in the U.S. now being vaccinated against the coronavirus, the highly contagious Delta variant is quickly becoming a concern. "Our expectation should be, by July, this will be the dominant variant," he says.

Airdate 23 June 2021 8:48 AM Length 11 minutes.