

FICCI supportive of 'TRIPS waiver' proposal to ramp up COVID-19 vaccines manufacturing

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FICCI is encouraged by the US support for the 'TRIPS waiver' proposal, first advocated by India and South Africa as one vital tool to address the concerns on availability of COVID-19 vaccines. "We are confident, if accepted in the WTO and implemented, the temporary waiver would go a long way to enable scaling up of manufacturing and ensuring timely availability of affordable COVID-19 vaccines and essential medical products," says FICCI.

While the Indian Government is currently working towards the multilateral solution, there are other proposals eg invoking 'Compulsory Licenses' to alleviate the shortage of vaccines. However, it may not lead to 'enhancing' the manufacturing capacity in the near future. This is due to the fact that lack of availability of essential raw materials and inputs poses significant constraint to the quick expansion of production capacity of the COVID vaccines. Further, several regulatory and safety issues will have to be addressed, and this may take some time.

The provision of Compulsory Licensing must be used cautiously and with utmost discretion. If not used judiciously, it may discourage innovator companies, which have heavily invested in R&D, and turn out to be counterproductive to the present situation.

Further, FICCI strongly believes that in the larger and long-term interest of the country and its citizens, India should not rush to do anything unilaterally that may undermine its present efforts to arrive at a 'multilateral solution' on this issue. This approach will be more acceptable to the global business and larger community worldwide. Our efforts should be to find a 'fine balance' between effectively managing India's present public health concerns on the one hand, amply demonstrating that India values and respects the global rules on IPR / TRIPS Agreement, on the other.

The immediate focus has to be on connecting with the 'right' global companies to facilitate 'technology transfer' and voluntary licenses to Indian companies that have the capacity and capability for mass-production of COVID vaccines. This will be a

definite game-changer and help in creating a robust manufacturing ecosystem with scalability in the country. FICCI believes that the government has initiated steps in this direction, and we believe that these should be concluded soon.