



STATEMENT

G20 MUST PROVIDE MORE SUPPORT TO AVERT COVID-19 OXYGEN SHORTAGES AND RELATED DEATHS

9 July 2021

The [Every Breath Counts Coalition](#) is calling on G20 Finance and Development Ministers to take immediate action to ensure that low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) have the medical oxygen they need to treat all patients during the pandemic by enabling the [Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator \(ACT-A\) Oxygen Emergency Taskforce](#)¹ to respond quickly (within days) to LMICs in oxygen crisis.

The need for medical oxygen to treat COVID-19 patients across all LMICs tripled in June and has now reached a massive 15 million cubic meters per day, the equivalent of two million large cylinders. The annual cost of meeting this need is estimated at \$US3 billion.²

The ACT-A Oxygen Emergency Taskforce needs an immediate injection of \$US400 million in emergency funding to directly procure liquid oxygen supplies from industry, transport them to the worst-affected countries, prepare hospitals to receive the new supplies, and address supply bottlenecks. The funding is also needed to mobilize a network of trained technicians to install, operate, maintain, and fix broken oxygen equipment.

This global emergency funding should complement the financing now available to LMIC governments through the Global Fund. To date, the Global Fund has awarded \$US250 million in oxygen support to 33 LMICs, largely for PSA plants, oxygen concentrators, cylinders, ventilators, and related supplies and services.

To accelerate the uptake of liquid oxygen, Taskforce co-chair Unitaid recently announced [landmark agreements](#) with medical gas giants Air Liquide and Linde. Funding is urgently needed to operationalize these agreements to ensure that LMICs can also access bulk supplies of liquid oxygen during the crisis.

G20 countries have a direct stake in access to medical oxygen.

All six of the leading medical gas companies are headquartered in G20 countries - Air Liquide in France, Linde in the UK, Messer in Germany, SOL in Italy, Air Products in the USA, and Taiyo Nippon Sanso Corporation (Nippon Gases/Matheson Gas) in Japan.

And seven G20 countries have reported oxygen shortages and deaths, including Brazil, India, Argentina, Russia, Indonesia, South Africa, and Mexico. In the past week alone these countries have reported more than 30,000 deaths due to COVID-19.

To date, not one of these seven G20 countries has been able to protect more than 50% of their populations with one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and most coverage rates are below 25% including India (21%), Russia (18%), Indonesia (12%), and South Africa 6%.³ With such appallingly slow vaccine rollout, COVID-19 case fatality rates will remain tragically high as oxygen is one of the only treatments available for COVID-19 patients in these settings.

The very least the G20 can do as countries wait for vaccine is to ensure that they have oxygen and medicines to keep very sick patients alive.

Greater G20 investments in medical oxygen will continue to save lives beyond the pandemic, especially among newborns, children, women in childbirth, and adults with communicable and non-communicable diseases, significantly increasing the impact of G20 leadership and investments in global health.

Medical oxygen is truly an investment that will strengthen all health systems.

Every Breath Counts is a coalition of 50 United Nations and multilateral health and development agencies, companies, foundations, non-government organizations (NGOs), and academic institutions supporting low- and middle-income countries to reduce deaths from pneumonia, including from COVID-19.

¹ The Taskforce is co-chaired by Unitaid and Wellcome, and includes the Access to Medicine Foundation, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), Every Breath Counts, Global Fund, PATH, Save the Children, UNICEF, UNOPS, World Bank, WHO and the WHO Biomedical Procurement Consortium (ALIMA, BMGF, IMC, MSF, UNDP, UNHCR, UNOPS, USAID, and WFP).

² See the [COVID-19 Oxygen Needs Tracker](#) by PATH, CHAI, and Every Breath Counts, 8 July 2021.

³ See [Our World in Data](#), 8 July 2021.