

Pfizer Is Obsessed with One Thing in this Pandemic. And It's Not Saving Lives

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Pfizer is the corporation that has profited most from Covid-19 vaccines to date. Pfizer uses its power to aggressively defend and extend its patents.

The total sales for the Pfizer vaccine will likely [exceed \\$30 billion in 2021 alone](#). Pfizer shares its profits with its partner company – which means they are expecting at least \$15 billion this year, bumping their total revenue next year to around \$60 billion – one quarter of which will be accounted for by the vaccine.

According to one financial journalist [“That would make it the second-highest revenue-generating drug anytime, anywhere”](#)

Profiting from the pandemic

These sales will bring in a substantial profit for the company – particularly because the [vaccine received nearly \\$6 billion](#) from the American government’s contract for production and roll out costs. [The German government](#) supported the research, while official reports suggest Pfizer and its partner spent [only around \\$1 billion in additional research](#) costs last year.

Unlike other corporations Pfizer has explicitly said it will profit throughout the pandemic. It has sold very small quantities to the global distribution body Covax and African Union “at cost”, which it claims to be [about \\$6.75 per dose](#). In fact, experts have suggested these types of vaccines could cost as little as 60 cents to \$2 per dose to make. However, Pfizer is selling to most countries [at \\$19.50 per dose](#), supposedly a special pandemic price, but clearly one which allows the corporation to make a large profit.

But a large profit isn’t enough for Pfizer, and it seems clear prices will rise steeply once they decide the pandemic is ‘over’. A [senior executive has suggested \\$150-175 per dose](#) would be more ‘normal’ pricing for a vaccine of this sort.

Pfizer claims these astronomical prices are needed to recoup R&D costs. But a glance at their accounts last year shows that the corporation [returned a whopping \\$8.4 billion to shareholders](#) in dividends and [reported a profit of \\$8.7bn](#).

Pfizer has sold its vaccines largely to rich countries. They've sold more than [three times the amount to high income countries \(1.6 billion\)](#) as they have to the rest of the world (560 million), while tiny quantities have been sold to low income countries. The international distribution network Covax has managed to secure a mere 40 million.

A vast lobbying effort

[Pfizer's former CEO](#) was instrumental in developing the global patent agreement – known as TRIPS – and intellectual property is a bedrock of Pfizer's profits. Pfizer's CEO led the charge to bypass the WHO's technology sharing programme CTAP, [labelling it "nonsense"](#). This has helped render this important tool ineffective to date.

In its most [recent annual report](#) the corporation seems proud of its role in pushing for even stronger patent law stating "Our industry advocacy [lobbying] efforts focus on seeking a fair and transparent business environment for foreign manufacturers, underscoring the importance of strong intellectual property systems." They say that "While the global intellectual property environment has generally improved following WTO-TRIPS and bilateral/multilateral trade agreements, our growth and ability to bring new product innovation to patients depends on *further progress in intellectual property protection* [emphasis added]"

This lobbying clout is important. [Pfizer and its lobbying body PhRMA](#) were the top spending lobbyists in the US healthcare sector in the last 2 decades. They use the power lobbying gives them to promote and extend their rights of secrecy ('data exclusivity') over medical development and their monopoly protection which allows them to charge astronomical prices. [They support the US government](#) including higher levels of monopoly protection in new trade deals.

It's not just Covid-19

Last year, we looked at Pfizer's [troubling history of profiteering](#). In one example, Pfizer and its British distributor [hugely hiked the prices of anti-epilepsy](#) drug phenytoin which 48,000 NHS patients relied upon. NHS expenditure on the drug rose from £2 million a year to £50 million in a single year, with the cost of 100mg packs rising from £2.83 to £67.50. Overall, UK wholesalers and pharmacies faced price hikes of between 2,300% and 2,600%.

In 2009, [Pfizer was forced to pay \\$2.3 billion](#) in a set of complex suits which included the company's illegal marketing of arthritis drug Bextra, as well as giving kickbacks to doctors. A whistleblower claimed that sales staff were incentivised to sell Bextra to doctors for medical conditions for which the drug wasn't approved and at doses up to eight times those recommended. "At Pfizer I was expected to increase profits at all costs, even when sales meant endangering lives. I couldn't do that," he stated.

MSF [ran a campaign against the price of Pfizer's pneumonia vaccines](#), which it claimed were 68 times more expensive in 2015 than in 2001. While Pfizer did reduce prices for the lowest income countries, MSF said the cost to vaccinate remained "roughly US\$9 for each child to be vaccinated in the poorest countries, and as much as \$80 per child for middle-income countries". It claimed Pfizer and GSK have earned over \$50 billion for the drug, but "Today, 55 million children around the world still do not have access to the pneumonia vaccine, largely due to high prices."

What we can do

Pfizer's obsession with maximising its profits during the pandemic is in keeping with its troubling record. But there is no reason big pharma companies should remain in the driving seat.

Governments have the power to put global public health first.

We are campaigning for the suspension of patents on all Covid-19 vaccines to help scale up the global vaccine effort and give the world the best chance of getting this disease under control.

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