

White House shrugs off WHO criticism over COVID-19 vaccine

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The White House on Tuesday pushed back on concerns expressed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) after a US health official said a coronavirus vaccine might be approved without completing full trials.

"The US will continue to engage our international partners to ensure we defeat this virus, but we will not be constrained by multilateral organisations influenced by the corrupt WHO and China," said White House spokesperson Judd Deere in a statement.

"This president will spare no expense to ensure that any new vaccine maintains our own FDA's gold standard for safety and efficacy, is thoroughly tested, and saves lives," he said.

US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) commissioner Stephen Hahn told the Financial Times in an interview published on Sunday that the FDA was prepared

to authorise a coronavirus vaccine before late-stage phase three clinical trials were complete, as long as officials are convinced the benefits outweigh the risks.

On Monday, WHO officials said moving too quickly to make a vaccine widely available could pose risks.

"If you move too quickly to vaccinate... millions of people, you may miss certain adverse effects," said Mike Ryan, the head of WHO's emergencies program.

WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan said the FDA's approach was "not something that you do very lightly." She said WHO's preferred approach would be to have a full set of data that could be used for the pre-qualification of vaccines.

President Donald Trump has been critical of the WHO's handling of the coronavirus pandemic, accusing it of being too focused on China and issuing bad advice. In May, Trump announced the US was cutting ties to the organisation.

Phase three trials, in which randomised patients are treated with a drug or a placebo without participants or doctors knowing which group they were in, are considered the gold standard for clinical trials.

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