

Bill Gates says Covid risks have 'dramatically reduced' but another pandemic is coming

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Bill Gates said Friday that the risks of severe disease from Covid-19 have "dramatically reduced" but another pandemic is all but certain.

Speaking to CNBC's Hadley Gamble at Germany's annual Munich Security Conference, Gates, co-chair of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, said that a potential new pandemic would likely stem from a different pathogen to that of the coronavirus family.

But he added that advances in medical technology should help the world do a better job of fighting it — if investments are made now.

"We'll have another pandemic. It will be a different pathogen next time," Gates said.

Two years into the coronavirus pandemic, Gates said the worst effects have faded as huge swathes of the global population have gained some level of immunity. Its severity has also waned with the latest omicron variant.

However, Gates said that in many places that was due to virus itself, which creates a level of immunity, and has "done a better job of getting out to the world population than we have with vaccines."

"The chance of severe disease, which is mainly associated with being elderly and having obesity or diabetes, those risks are now dramatically reduced because of that infection exposure," he said.

Gates said it was already "too late" to reach the World Health Organization's goal to vaccinate 70% of the global population by mid-2022. Currently 61.9% of the world population has received at least one dose of a Covid-19 vaccine.

He added that the world should move faster in the future to develop and distribute vaccines, calling on governments to invest now.

"Next time we should try and make it, instead of two years, we should make it more like six months," Gates said, adding that standardized platforms, including messenger RNA (mRNA) technology, would make that possible.

"The cost of being ready for the next pandemic is not that large. It's not like climate change. If we're rational, yes, the next time we'll catch it early."

Gates, through the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, has partnered with the U.K.'s Wellcome Trust to donate \$300 million to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, which helped form the Covax program to deliver vaccines to low- and middle-income countries.

The CEPI is aiming to raise \$3.5 billion in an effort cut the time required to develop a new vaccine to just 100 days.

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