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San Francisco, January 20 (RHC)-- Software magnate Bill Gates has raised the specter of future viruses that could be more lethal than COVID-19, saying rich countries should ramp up vaccine funding to brace for potentially catastrophic outbreaks.

The Microsoft co-founder made his comments while announcing a new \$150 million pledge by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI). He noted that while COVID-19's Delta and Omicron variants were among the most transmissible viruses ever seen, the world could have been hit with a more virulent pathogen, killing far more people.

By investing in vaccine research and production capacity to ensure that future jabs are quickly made available all around the world, governments can prepare themselves to blunt future outbreaks, Gates said. “When we talk about spending billions to save... trillions of economic damage and tens of billions of lives, it’s a pretty good insurance policy.”

CEPI is trying to raise \$3.5 billion to shorten the time it takes to develop a new vaccine to 100 days. Gates credited the group with saving lives by helping to fund trials for several of the vaccines now authorized for inoculation against COVID-19, but he lamented that adequate supplies haven’t reached developing nations quickly enough.

“It was at-risk money that caused the trials to take place,” he said. “So there was a huge global benefit. We’re all a lot smarter now, and we need more capacity for the next time.”

Wellcome Trust, a UK charity that focuses on medical research, matched the Gates foundation with its own \$150 million pledge to CEPI. Jeremy Farrar, the director of Wellcome Trust, echoed Gates’ comments on the dangers of future pandemics. CEPI was formed after the 2013 to 2016 Ebola epidemic.

“We were then and we are now living in what I think is an era of more frequent and more complex epidemics and pandemics,” Farrar said.

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