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World cannot wait for vaccine, must work with tools at hand: Experts

The world cannot wait for, or expect, a vaccine to stop the pandemic. People and countries must work with the tools they have today, said many of the 16 speakers at the NUS Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine's final Covid-19 webinar last night.

"It is not going away, we are not going to eradicate it in the foreseeable future, so we have got to learn to live with it as a constant threat, keeping it at bay, stopping it from welling up, getting on with our economic and social lives," said Profes-

sor David Nabarro of Imperial College London.

Professor David Heymann of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine said there is an "extraordinary amount of research and development on vaccines". But even with a successful vaccine, there is insufficient capacity in the world today to produce enough for all who need it.

Many experts, both local and international, also stressed the critical need for global solidarity to

overcome the pandemic.

Dr Margaret Hamburg of the National Academy of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine in the United States said: "The biomedical research and health communities have come together in unprecedented ways, across disciplines and sectors and borders, and they have moved at unprecedented speed."

This, she said, gives her reason for optimism in the midst of the crisis.

Dr Marie-Paule Kieny of Inserm,

a public scientific and technological institute in France, said that there is "no alternative to global solidarity, because we are all there together".

She said some governments want to be able to immunise their whole population before anybody else gets the vaccine. "I think that this is not the way to go."

She hopes, in the rush for a vaccine, that no vaccine would be used before it is proven to be effective as that could lead to

greater "vaccine scepticism" and a loss of trust in children's vaccination programmes.

Dr Howard Njoo, Canada's deputy chief public health officer, said no country on its own will be able to beat the pandemic.

"Covid-19 is everywhere in the world, and I think the best way to beat this pandemic is for countries to learn from each other, share best practices and certainly I think cooperate in terms of trying to mitigate the spread of the virus further."

Professor John Wong, a senior adviser at the National University Health System, said the world has to remain united and pool collective expertise to tackle what is a global health, economic, social and geopolitical crisis.

He added: "Perhaps our greatest gift to our children and grandchildren is to learn from this and do everything to prevent the next pandemic."

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