

'Biggest product launch in the history of mankind' set to hit general cargo

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By Damian Brett



General cargo shippers using airfreight when a Covid-19 vaccine is launched are set to face capacity shortages and price hikes.

During the recent joint TIACA and Pharma.Aero [project Sunrays Project webinar](#), participants were asked what would happen with general cargo when a vaccine begins to be shipped.

Neel Jones Shah, global head of airfreight at freight forwarder Flexport, described the vaccine as “the biggest product launch in the history of mankind”.

He said there would be an impact on the availability of capacity, although at this stage it was hard to say what the extent of the impact would be.

He pointed out that even when Apple launches a new product, airfreight capacity is affected.

“There is going to be an impact in terms of the amount of available capacity because the global passenger fleet is for the most part suspended,” he said.

“We have lost a huge percentage of the belly freight – over 80% of the belly cargo capacity has been sidelined – so we are in an under capacity situation globally.

“To what extent this impacts regular commercial cargo, we don’t really know yet because we don’t know the regional production and distribution strategy for all the pharmaceutical shippers and at how much of this vaccine will need to travel by air vs how much that can go on the road network.”

He said that once there was clarity on the exact volumes, how much can be carried and what type of aircraft are best suited for vaccine shipments, the industry will have a clearer picture on the overall global commercial impact of this project.

“This isn’t a four week effort, this is a 2021 into 2022 effort, so it will be spread out over a number of months and not just impact the Christmas logistics need.”

Christos Spyrou chief executive of forwarder network Neutral Air Partner said it was likely that cargo would be bumped and prices would rise

He said: “General cargo will get delayed and bumped over a vaccine shipment. If you see the normal environment today, or before Covid-19, pharma gets priority over general cargo anyway so imagine what will happen with the vaccine.” He added: “The general cargo shippers might not be able to afford to pay the \$10, \$12, \$15 per kg to make the cargo a priority over the vaccines and we saw that during the PPE shipments.”

Nathan De Valck, Brussels Airport head of product and network development and chair of Pharma.Aero, added that the use of passenger aircraft to carry freight could again be ramped up and this could help create some extra capacity for general cargo.