



Medical Gases industry successfully ramped up oxygen supply to COVID-19 patients

As a major treatment intervention for patients with severe COVID-19, medical oxygen demand in hospitals in Europe's most impacted regions have risen to unprecedented levelsⁱ. Despite its challenges for the medical gas industry, Phillipe Cornille, the Secretary General of the European Industrial Gases Association (EIGA) said *"industry actions and authority decisions jointly allowed a continuous supply of medical oxygen saving lives every single day"*.

Medical gas producers have successfully delivered dramatically increased amounts of medical oxygen, despite the complexity of the process. Key issues that could disrupt supply have been avoided by the support of competent authorities, never compromising on safety for users and patients.

1. Hospital capacities

Installed oxygen capacities in hospitals were not designed for the demands of today's crisis and our specialists work around the clock to counter the demand. Additional liquid oxygen storage tanks have been installed in hospitals, and the need for prior local permits has been removed during the crisis periodⁱⁱ, speeding up the process.

2. Cylinder shortage

The supply chain quickly fell short of medical oxygen cylinders. We increased cylinder production sites' capacity and took action to identify, track and return unused or empty cylinders into the supply system while introducing additional cylinders on the market.

An urgent Multilateral Agreement [ⁱⁱⁱ] between the United Nations and its member states was published to allow the use of certain cylinders with expired test dates and allowing drivers needing a re-training certificate to work. Further measures included:

- A temporary one-year service life extension of CE-marked valves and regulators administering medicinal gases, and using cylinders not listed in the Marketing Authorization
- Ramping up the use of technical grade pressure, flow regulators and other gas administration accessories at healthcare facilities
- Increasing the filling capacity of medical cylinders by installing or using additional filling equipment in manufacturing facilities, without the need for prior local permits, inspections or authorizations.

3. Critical staff

Our workers were categorized as 'critical occupations' by the European Commission^{iv}, in the supply of primary COVID-19 medicines. The sector also identified critical roles. To assure continuity and acceleration of supply, Qualified Persons release batches remotely and for multiple production sites.

4. Transport

Efficiency is being optimized by allowing 24/7 transport without restrictions for medical gases, within the country and across borders. Social distancing is being practiced through electronic delivery documents replacing paperwork, protecting drivers and receiving healthcare workers.



About EIGA

EIGA (the European Industrial Gases Association) is an association representing the manufacturers and distributors of industrial and medical gases in Europe such as:

- *Hydrogen (for cleaner fuels)*
- *Nitrogen (for safer processes throughout industry; to preserve cells for instance at cryobanks)*
- *Carbon dioxide (for atmospheric food packaging; as an insufflation gas and for cryotherapy)*
- *Acetylene (for welding applications)*
- *Oxygen (for efficient steel production and widely use in the healthcare from inhalation therapy to resuscitation)*
- *And many more.*

There are other medical gases used for lung applications (e.g. nitric oxide).

EIGA is a stakeholder with EMA.

ⁱ WHO [situation report 41](#)

ⁱⁱ At the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, which could differ in time per country, or upon request of the national/local competent authorities, EIGA members commit to immediately stop the proposed temporary measures and re-instate the original requirements as per the GMP and Market Authorisation requirements.

ⁱⁱⁱ United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) - Multilateral Agreement [M324](#), [M325](#), [M326](#) , or see down [this list](#) for the latest status.

^{iv} European Commission [communication](#) on “the exercise of the free movement of workers during COVID-19 outbreak”

List of EIGA Briefing Notes:

BN_25_20_COVID-19-Emergency_Measures_to_Maintain_Continuous_Supply_of_Medical_Gases

BN_26_20_COVID-19_Measures_to_Disinfect_Externally_Contaminated_Gas_Packages

BN_27_20_COVID-19_Temporary_Use_of_Equipment_Not_CE_Marked_as_Devices_in_Medical_Gas_Service