

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Data sharing in a pandemic versus data sharing in normal times ultimately at the same thing, but obviously, there's been a great urgency for some of this data to be shared during the COVID-19 pandemic. I think what we've learned from that is that in many cases there are barriers that have prevented data access and sharing. Most of the legal frameworks and systems are still completely the same during the pandemic, it's just that the process has happened a lot quicker.

And I think one of the things that we've learned is that those processes need to be improved in the long term. We need to have governance, we need to have ethics, we need to have oversight, but ultimately, we need to make systems that are in place that allow us to share data in an appropriate manner. So that is making sure that we don't share large data sets, we minimise them, they're anonymized, but when it's appropriate, we should be facilitating data sharing, not closeting data away as a private collection.

So data sharing during a pandemic is really absolutely essential to the global surveillance effort of any pathogen. If we weren't sharing data, for example, if the UK had not shared data on the alpha variant in December 2020, then the world wouldn't have known about it. Likewise with the Delta variant and now with the Omnicom variant. The efforts of South African scientists to share that data, to be open about it, has been absolutely essential to our response to the pandemic.

It's allowed other countries to understand what's going on. If we don't share that, also the data means it's closeted away. People are not aware of the changes in potentially viral population that may be really essential for our understanding of development of a vaccine or the understanding of severity of disease. So I think together as a global scientific community, we can achieve much more than we can as individual countries.