



Healthcare Logistics

Global vaccine distribution: The strategic role of Montevideo's Airport Free Zone

A vital gateway for the Americas

From the pen of
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The safe and efficient distribution of vaccines* across continents is one of the greatest challenges for healthcare logistics. As supply chain disruptions and the need for temperature-sensitive handling continue to shape global vaccine distribution, logistics leaders must rethink their strategies to guarantee efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and compliance in their quest to ensure that vaccines are always where they need to be when they are needed.

* This article focuses on vaccine logistics; however, the services discussed are applicable to all healthcare products

A vital gateway for the Americas



To overcome barriers, such as the regulatory complexities of moving healthcare products across borders and the need to optimise costs and sustainability, while at the same time ensuring timely delivery (especially during public health emergencies), the healthcare industry must embrace optimally located multi-modal distribution hubs that offer efficiency, regulatory advantages, and cutting-edge infrastructure.

Enter the Montevideo Airport Free Zone—one of the most strategic assets in the global vaccine distribution effort—located at Carrasco International Airport, Montevideo Free Airport Zone provides an ideal trans-shipment point for vaccines arriving from Europe and destined for North, Central, and South America. Its multimodal capabilities mean that vaccines can be received by sea and seamlessly re-exported via air, land, or sea, optimising routes based on market demand and urgency.

A healthcare logistics powerhouse

Vaccines arriving in Montevideo from Europe undergo quality assurance and repackaging before they are dispatched:

To North America:



Through direct air freight to major distribution centres.

To Central America:



Using multimodal solutions such as air-to-land distribution via key logistics hubs.

To South America:



With quick last-mile services to major regional markets, ensuring rapid delivery.





Regulatory and tax advantages for pharmaceutical companies

Operating under Uruguay's Free Zone Law, Montevideo Free Airport Zone offers significant tax exemptions, making it an attractive location for pharmaceutical companies. Unlike traditional bonded warehouses, free zone facilities offer:

- Duty-free and VAT-free storage and re-export of vaccines, reducing costs.
- Regulatory flexibility, enabling companies to consolidate shipments and optimise supply chains without incurring additional tariffs.
- Long-term legal stability, as Uruguay's Free Zone Law guarantees these benefits for the duration of a company's agreement with the zone.

CEIV pharma-certified infrastructure for vaccine integrity

Vaccine integrity is non-negotiable. Montevideo Free Airport Zone has been a pioneer in healthcare logistics, holding IATA CEIV Pharma certification and being a founding member of Pharma Aero. Its dedicated healthcare facilities include:

- State-of-the-art temperature-controlled storage, covering ultra-cold (-80°C), frozen (-20°C), and refrigerated ($+2^{\circ}\text{C}$ to $+8^{\circ}\text{C}$) needs.
- End-to-end quality control, including real-time monitoring, validated handling protocols, and stringent security measures.
- A dedicated second pharmaceutical facility, which opened in 2021 doubled capacity and enhanced vaccine handling capabilities.

Kuehne+Nagel's presence at Montevideo's Airport Free Zone

Kuehne+Nagel's innovative initiatives at Montevideo's Airport Free Zone are setting new benchmarks for efficiency and reliability.



Vaccines, pharmaceuticals and biotech products arrive at the IATA CEIV-certified, fully GxP-compliant Kuehne+Nagel hub at the Montevideo Airport Free Zone via sea from Europe, where leveraging quality-certified multimodal capabilities shipments are consolidated and distributed to Central, South and North America.

To avoid double taxation, cargo remains “in transit” while it is stored at the Kuehne+Nagel quality-certified facilities in the free zone. Import tax does not apply at the Montevideo Airport Free Zone. Once a shipment is ready for distribution to the customer, the excellent infrastructure and good regulatory compliance makes it possible for goods to clear customs within 24 hours.

The temporary, temperature-controlled warehousing facilities ensures that a supply of vaccines is always a short journey away from where they are needed and ready for distribution when they are needed, for example, during flu season, or during a disease outbreak.

The highly trained and qualified Kuehne+Nagel Healthcare Logistics experts complete extensive lane risk assessments and routing analysis based on risk mitigation to safeguard product integrity at every step of the onward journey. The team provide 24/7 support, and act as a single point of contact to simplify communication and offer personalised support.





Conclusion: The future of vaccine logistics lies in smart hubs

As the world continues to battle evolving health crises, efficient vaccine distribution is more critical than ever. The Montevideo Airport Free Zone serves as a blueprint for the future of healthcare logistics, setting a new standard and showcasing how free zones, combined with cross-docking and multimodal hubs can enhance resilience in global healthcare supply chains.

By utilising Montevideo Free Airport Zone, pharmaceutical companies can reduce lead times for vaccine deployment across the

Americas, while at the same time lowering logistics costs through tax benefits and supply chain optimisation, operating at all times in compliance with global and regional regulatory standards.

Now is the time to rethink vaccine logistics. The answer isn't just faster planes—it's smarter supply chain hubs like Montevideo, where pharmaceutical companies and logistics providers can build more agile, resilient, and sustainable supply chains for the future of global healthcare.

About us

With approximately 80,000 employees at almost 1,300 sites in close to 100 countries, the Kuehne+Nagel Group is one of the world's leading logistics providers. Headquartered in Switzerland, Kuehne+Nagel is listed in the Swiss blue-chip stock market index, the SMI. The Group is the global number one in air and sea logistics and has strong market positions in road and contract logistics.

Kuehne+Nagel is the logistics partner of choice for 400,000 customers worldwide. Using its global network, logistics expertise and data-based insights, the Group provides end-to-end supply chain solutions for global companies and industries. As a member of the Science Based Target Initiative (SBTi), Kuehne+Nagel is committed to sustainable logistics by reducing its own environmental footprint and by supporting its customers with low-carbon logistics solutions.

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