

Dutch government unveils coronavirus vaccination plans

November 20 2020, by Mike Corder



In this file photo dated Friday, April 24, 2020, a police officer is silhouetted as he passes a mural by artist Casper Cruse, showing a woman with a face mask holding a heart in the colors of the dutch flag in support for those suffering from the effects of the coronavirus, in The Hague, Netherlands. A Dutch advisory panel said Thursday Nov. 19, 2020, that the country's government should prioritize coronavirus vaccinations for people over age 60, those with underlying health problems and frontline health care workers when the first shots become available. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong, FILE)

The Dutch government will prioritize people aged over 60, those in health risk groups and frontline health care workers for coronavirus vaccinations when the shots become available, the health ministry announced Friday.

Outlining its strategy to protect people against the pandemic that has killed more than 1.36 million people worldwide, the ministry said vaccinations will be free and voluntary.

Dutch health authorities already have bought 25 million syringes and extra freezers for vaccines that need to be stored at very low temperatures, the ministry said.

"Luckily, the Netherlands has experience with large vaccination campaigns," Health Minister Hugo de Jonge said. "When vaccines are delivered, everything is ready. That will probably be in the first months of 2021. But if [vaccine](#) makers succeed in delivering in December, we can get to work straight away."

The ministry said that based on [recent reports](#) from producers working on vaccines, it expects to be able to vaccinate around 3.5 million people in the first quarter of 2021.

The government will begin by offering vaccinations to the approximately 155,000 people who live in [care homes](#), and those who live in psychiatric institutions as well as the staff.

Without the cost of the vaccine shots themselves, the expected cost of the vaccination operation in the country of just over 17 million people is expected to be between 900 million euros and 1 billion euros (\$1.1-1.2 billion).

The [health ministry](#) said that the Netherlands is playing "an active role" in European Union negotiations with five vaccine developers and the country has contracts in place for nearly 50 million shots, enough for nearly 28 million people. Negotiations are still underway with Moderna for a further 3.1 million shots. The total cost of the vaccines is expected to be around 700 million euros.

"The vaccine is our greatest asset to overcome this crisis, to put the pandemic behind us," De Jonge said, urging people to get vaccinated "not just for yourself, but for each other. We all have a responsibility to protect one another."

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