

Bahrain now 2nd nation to grant Pfizer shot emergency use

December 4 2020, by Jon Gambrell



In this Sept. 21, 2011 file photo, traffic police divert traffic to ease congestion along roads in the capital of Manama, Bahrain. The island kingdom of Bahrain says it has become the second nation in the world to grant emergency-use authorization for the coronavirus vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech. The state-run Bahrain News Agency made the announcement on Friday, Dec. 4, 2020. (AP Photo/Hasan Jamali)

The island kingdom of Bahrain said it has become the second nation in the world to grant an emergency-use authorization for the coronavirus vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech.

The state-run Bahrain News Agency made the announcement on Friday night, following an earlier announcement by the United Kingdom on Wednesday, making Britain the first in the world.

"The confirmation of approval by the National Health Regulatory Authority of the kingdom of Bahrain followed thorough analysis and review undertaken by the authority of all available data," the kingdom said.

Bahrain did not say how many vaccines it has purchased, nor when vaccinations would begin. It did not respond to questions from The Associated Press. The Pfizer shots, a so-called "mRNA vaccine," contain a piece of genetic code that trains the immune system to recognize the spiked protein on the surface of the virus.

Pfizer later told the AP that the details of its sales agreement with Bahrain, including the "timing of delivery and the volume of doses," was confidential and declined to comment.

"We have developed detailed logistical plans and tools to support effective vaccine transport, storage and continuous temperature monitoring," Pfizer said. "Our distribution is built on a flexible just in time system which will ship the frozen vials to the point of vaccination."

The immediate challenge for Bahrain would be the conditions in which the vaccine must be kept. It must be stored and shipped at ultra-cold temperatures of around minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit). Bahrain is a Mideast nation that regularly sees temperatures in the summer of around 40 C (104 Fahrenheit) with high humidity.

Bahrain operates a state-owned carrier, Gulf Air, that could be used to transport the vaccine. In the nearby United Arab Emirates, the Dubai-based long-haul carrier Emirates has already said it is preparing its facilities to distribute vaccines at ultra-cold temperatures.



In this Dec. 4, 2020 file photo, a general view of the Pfizer Manufacturing plant in Puurs, Belgium. The island kingdom of Bahrain says it has become the second nation in the world to grant emergency-use authorization for the coronavirus vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech. The state-run Bahrain News Agency made the announcement on Friday. (AP Photo/Olivier Matthys)

The vaccine also requires two doses be given three weeks apart.

Bahrain had already granted emergency-use authorization for a Chinese vaccine made by Sinopharm and has inoculate some 6,000 people with it. That vaccine, an "inactivated" shot made by growing the whole virus in a lab and then killing it, also is in use in the UAE. Pfizer's vaccine does not contain the coronavirus itself.

"The approval of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine will add a further important layer to the kingdom's national COVID-19 response, which has strongly prioritized protecting the health of all citizens and residents during the pandemic," said Dr. Mariam al-Jalahma, the CEO of Bahrain's National Health Regulatory Authority.

BioNTech, which owns the vaccine, said it has so far signed deals to supply 570 million doses worldwide in 2021, with options to deliver 600 million more. It hopes to supply at least 1.3 billion in 2021.

Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, is a small island off the coast of Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf.

With a population of 1.6 million, it has reported more than 87,000 cases and 341 deaths, according to the government. Over 85,000 people have

recovered from the COVID-19 illness that is caused by the virus.

The country is also home to a large expatriate population, with many low-paid laborers from Asia living in tight housing. In July, authorities told the AP they had moved 8,000 laborers to new accommodations, disinfected housing and implemented a rule requiring no more than five laborers per room, with about 3 meters (10 feet) of space for each one.

The Bahraini government says it has conducted over 2 million coronavirus tests across the island. It initially blamed its higher per-capita infection rate on that.

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