

Bahrain plans free shots, Saudi Arabia approves Pfizer jab

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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)

Bahrain has announced plans to give the public free coronavirus vaccines, as Saudi Arabia said it approved an inoculation by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech to fight the pandemic.

The island nation of Bahrain, off the coast of Saudi Arabia, made the [vaccine](#) pledge in an announcement published late Thursday by its state-run Bahrain News Agency.

"A safe vaccine will be provided free of charge to all citizens and residents within the kingdom," the statement said, without elaborating on which vaccine it would offer.

Bahrain plans to inoculate everyone 18 years and older in the kingdom at 27 different medical facilities, hoping to be able to vaccinate 10,000 people a day. Bahrain, an island in the Persian Gulf home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, has a population of around 1.5 million people.

A week ago, Bahrain said it had become the second nation in the world to grant an emergency-use authorization to the Pfizer vaccine after the United Kingdom.

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. To be vaccinated, a person receives two shots over 21 days.

In the time since, Bahrain has not responded to questions from The Associated Press, including on Friday. Pfizer told the AP that the details of its sales agreement with Bahrain, including the "timing of delivery and the volume of doses," were confidential and declined to comment.

Bahrain had already granted emergency-use authorization for a Chinese vaccine made by Sinopharm and has inoculated some 6,000 people with

it. That vaccine is an "inactivated" shot made by growing the whole virus in a lab and then killing it.

The United Arab Emirates on Wednesday described the Sinopharm vaccine as 86% effective, but provided few details and answered no questions. It marked the first public release of information on the efficacy of that shot.

Earlier Thursday, Saudi Arabia's Food and Drug Authority said it had registered the Pfizer vaccine "so that [health authorities](#) in the kingdom can then import and use the vaccine."

The kingdom said it based its decision on information given by Pfizer on Nov. 24, without elaborating. Pfizer on Nov. 18 said its vaccine is 95% effective.

A major challenge for the Pfizer shot in the Mideast remains the weather, however. The vaccines must be stored and shipped at ultra-[cold temperatures](#) of around minus 70 degrees Celsius (minus 94 degrees Fahrenheit).

Saudi Arabia said its Health Ministry later would announce plans on how it would distribute the vaccine in the kingdom, the biggest Gulf Arab state, with a population of 34 million people.

Egypt received its first shipment of the Sinopharm vaccine on Thursday via the United Arab Emirates.

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