

# China's first vaccine hustled to market as race to inoculate 1.3bn speeds up

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China has granted "conditional" market approval to a Sinopharm vaccine with a reported 79 percent efficacy rate against COVID-19, health authorities said Thursday, a major stride towards inoculating the world's largest population.

The Sinopharm jab, which has surged ahead of a raft of Chinese competitors during Phase 3 trials, could signal a breakthrough in the battle to squash the pandemic in Asia.

Around 4.5 million doses of largely unproven emergency vaccines made locally have already been given to [health workers](#) and other workers destined for overseas jobs, according to authorities.

On Wednesday, Sinopharm announced its leading candidate had a 79.34 percent efficacy rate.

That is lower than rival jabs developed in the West by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna—with 95 and 94 percent rates respectively—but still a game-changer for China.

Chen Shifei, deputy commissioner of the National Medical Products Administration, on Thursday told reporters his agency had granted a "conditional listing" to Sinopharm's [vaccine](#).

A conditional listing helps hustle emergency drugs to market in cases when [clinical trials](#) are yet to meet normal standards but indicate they

will work.

"The known benefits of Sinopharm's new inactivated coronavirus vaccine are bigger than the known and potential risks," Chen added.

The listing allows the government to "extend vaccination to high-risk groups, those susceptible to a severe viral infection... and the elderly," Zeng Yixin, Vice Minister of the National Health Commission told reporters.

But China faces the unprecedented challenge of getting vaccines to a population of more than 1.3 billion people.

"The general view is you have to vaccinate 60 to 70 percent to establish universal protection," Zeng added.

Beijing plans to vaccinate millions this winter in the run-up to Lunar New Year.

"I'm convinced—and please be convinced—that the production of COVID-19 vaccines can meet the demand of large-scale vaccination we have in China," Mao Junfeng, head of Consumer Goods Industry Department added.

China has also pledged to swiftly share its vaccines with lesser developed countries at a "fair price", as it seeks global leadership in the recovery from a pandemic which first emerged in the central Chinese city of Wuhan a year ago.

As a winter wave of virus infections batters much of the world, spurring fresh lockdowns and grim spikes in death tolls, attention has returned to China's management of the pandemic.

China has broadly stamped out the virus inside its borders, introducing swift local lockdowns and mass testing when cases emerge.

Beijing has been at pains to retool the pandemic story in its favour, touting the fast reflexes of its Communist leadership in locking down the country and restarting the economy.

China is forecast to be the only major economy to post positive growth this year.

But it has been heavily criticised for closing down discussion and reporting that questions the official narrative.

On Monday a Shanghai court jailed citizen journalist Zhang Zhan for four years for her reporting from Wuhan during the early months of the pandemic.

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