

# Cyberattack hits EU vaccine regulator as West grapples with virus surge

December 9 2020

---



Credit: CC0 Public Domain

An EU regulator considering the rapid approval of coronavirus vaccines said Wednesday it had been the target of a cyberattack, as Germany and other northern hemisphere countries grappled with a winter surge in the

pandemic.

The Amsterdam-based European Medicines Agency (EMA) reported the cyberattack as European countries eagerly await a vaccine, including Germany where Chancellor Angela Merkel is pushing for tougher action against a second wave that is proving deadlier than the first there.

The EMA said it could not give details of the cyberattack as it investigated the case with law enforcement agencies.

The attack comes after Britain accused Kremlin-linked hackers in July of targeting labs researching coronavirus vaccines and after a US newspaper reported that cybercriminals had tried to attack several pharmaceutical firms developing vaccines.

They included Johnson & Johnson, Novavax, AstraZeneca and South Korean laboratories.

The EMA has said it will give a decision on conditional approval for Pfizer/BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine at a meeting that will be held by December 29 at the latest.

A ruling on Moderna's version should follow by January 12.

In Berlin Wednesday, Merkel urged regions to take more drastic action to curb the virus spread, after state leaders agreed to ease what are already comparatively modest social restrictions for the Christmas holidays.

After Britain on Tuesday gave out the first approved vaccine jabs in the Western world, Canada on Wednesday approved the same Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine

Both Russia and China have already begun inoculation campaigns with domestically produced vaccines

The Russian space agency said on Wednesday it planned to offer the Sputnik [coronavirus](#) vaccine to cosmonauts but insisted it would be on a voluntary basis.

And the United States is expected to grant emergency authorisation soon to the Pfizer-BioNTech jab.

Israel accepted its first shipment of the Pfizer vaccine on Wednesday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promising to be the first to be injected.

"What is important to me is that Israeli citizens get vaccinated," he said. "I want to serve as an example to them."

The [vaccine](#) has yet to pass regulatory hurdles there.

The virus has now killed more than 1.5 million worldwide since it emerged in China late last year.

## **Change 'for the better'**

Merkel has been in no mood for celebration, repeatedly urging regional leaders who have responsibility for health policies to clamp down more strongly. Germany's daily death toll hit a new high of 590 on Wednesday.

"If we have too many contacts before Christmas and it ends up being the last Christmas with the grandparents, then we'd really have failed," she said.

Two weeks ago, Germany's states agreed rules limiting social mixing to five people but agreed to double the limit to 10 for the holiday season—something Merkel argued against.

The United States is also mired in political rows over an epidemic that has killed more than 280,000—the world's worst toll.

President Donald Trump signed an executive order on Tuesday that sought to guarantee access to vaccines for all Americans, but critics immediately queried what legal force it could have given drug firms have already signed contracts with other countries.

Biden, who will take over from Trump in January, urged Congress to come up with funding to stop the virus response from stalling, and unveiled his plan for 100 million jobs in his first 100 days.

"I'm absolutely convinced that in 100 days, we can change the course of the disease and change life in America for the better," he said Tuesday.

## **Hunger the bigger fear**

UN rights chief Michelle Bachelet told reporters the pandemic had zeroed in on fissures in societies and had exposed "all our failures to invest in building fair and equitable societies".

Experts are warning that hunger in the Philippines has reached new levels thanks in part to restrictions that have crippled the economy and left many without livelihoods.

And there were dark warnings too for democracy, with a Swedish-based watchdog saying more than 60 percent of countries had put in place anti-democratic measures during the pandemic.

Kevin Casas-Zamora of International IDEA told AFP he expected authoritarian governments to act in this way but added: "What is more surprising is that so many democracies have adopted measures that are problematic on the standpoint of democracy and human rights."

Even countries trying to push forward with democratic processes have faced criticism—Indonesia being the latest to hold elections against the advice of experts.

"Health is being trumped by political demands and that's very concerning. It's not worth it," said Hermawan Saputra of the Indonesian Public Health Experts' Association.

© 2020 AFP

Citation: Cyberattack hits EU vaccine regulator as West grapples with virus surge (2020, December 9) retrieved 16 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-cyberattack-eu-vaccine-west-grapples.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.