

EU members to start COVID-19 jabs 'the same day'

December 16 2020, by Marc Burleigh



Von der Leyen said there were enough doses for everyone in Europe

The EU's 27 member countries aim to start COVID-19 vaccinations on "the same day" in a sign of unity, possibly a day or two before Christmas, European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said

Wednesday.

Her statement to the European Parliament came as pressure mounted on the bloc to catch up with the United States and Britain, which have already started inoculating people with a vaccine made by Pfizer and BioNTech.

"To get to the end of the pandemic, we will need up to 70 percent of the population vaccinated. This is a huge task, a big task. So let's start as soon as possible with the vaccination together, as 27, with a start at the same day," von der Leyen told MEPs.

Von der Leyen emphasised that the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine was the first of six potential vaccines for which the EU has secured contracts.

"Finally, within a week, the first vaccine will be authorised so that vaccinations can start immediately, and more will follow in the new year," she said.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA), which regulates the release of medicines in the EU, is bringing forward to next Monday a special meeting originally planned a week later to discuss conditional approval for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.

EU officials said that, if that EMA meeting gives a green light, the vaccine would be authorised two days later.

As EU citizens watched first Britain last week then the US this week start vaccinations, Germany—home to BioNTech and von der Leyen—pressed for the EMA to allow the jab to be made available before Christmas.

EU states have the option of individually going ahead with vaccinations

earlier under EMA emergency rules, but the European Commission wants a coordinated roll-out across the bloc to ensure no member state is left behind.

'Christmas gift'

With the EMA meeting brought forward, "this means that this [vaccine](#) will be the Christmas gift for all Europeans if everything goes well," said the European commissioner in charge of internal security, Margaritis Schinas.

Germany's European affairs minister, Michael Roth, whose country holds the rotating EU presidency, told MEPs that Europe was intent more on getting the vaccination roll-out right rather than being first.

"We need to also be careful that we don't succumb to political pressures, when it comes to the authorisation processes," he said.

A vaccination rate of 60-70 percent was needed to protect the EU from the virus, meaning a majority of EU citizens needed to trust the jabs that would be on offer, Roth explained.

"We need to monitor the progress of a vaccination programme so that everybody knows what happens in cases of vaccination and that new fears don't arise," he said.

Von der Leyen stressed that the European Union was working to also give countries outside the bloc access to the vaccines.

"In total, we have bought more than enough doses for everyone in Europe. And we will be able to support our neighbours and our partners around the world through COVAX so that no one is left behind."

COVAX is an initiative launched by the World Health Organization, the European Commission and France to ensure that vaccines proven to be effective and safe are made available to all countries, and not only rich ones able to pre-emptively buy up doses.

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