

Netherlands aims to begin Pfizer-BioNTech shots by Jan 8

December 17 2020



People queue for a throat and nasal swab at a COVID-19 testing facility of the Municipal Health Authority GGD, in Utrecht, Netherlands, Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte imposed a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation ordering all non-essential shops and businesses such as hair salons, museums and theaters to close as coronavirus infection rates in the Netherlands rise sharply despite a two-month partial lockdown. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

The Dutch health minister said Thursday that coronavirus vaccinations using the Pfizer-BioNTech shots will start Jan. 8 if the European Union's medicines agency approves it for use next week.

Hugo de Jonge said that [health authorities](#) have developed a plan he described as "careful, safe and responsible."

The first vaccines will be given to staff at nursing homes and other [health care professionals](#).

In neighboring country Germany, authorities said Wednesday that vaccinations would start in nursing homes on Dec. 27.

The health ministry called the Jan. 8 date "the fastest feasible planning, taking into account all due care requirements and steps" that can only be taken once the European Medicines Agency greenlights the [vaccine](#).

Those steps include a Dutch health agency publishing advice on the vaccine's suitability for different sections of the Dutch population, and testing IT systems that will be used during the vaccination process.



Medical staff wait for the next in line for a throat and nasal swab at a COVID-19 testing facility of the Municipal Health Authority GGD, in Utrecht, Netherlands, Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2020. Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte imposed a tough lockdown Monday night in a speech to the nation ordering all non-essential shops and businesses such as hair salons, museums and theaters to close as coronavirus infection rates in the Netherlands rise sharply despite a two-month partial lockdown. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

"Ultimately, our goal is the highest possible vaccination coverage," De Jonge said. "We can only achieve this if people have confidence in the vaccine and in the vaccination process."

The ministry expects to get the first 500,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine before the end of the year, shortly after it is approved

by the EU medicines agency, which is meeting Monday to discuss approval.

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