

Qatar receives first coronavirus jabs

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Qatar received its first novel coronavirus vaccines on Monday, just hours after regulators approved the jab for use in the Gulf state, which says it will inoculate all residents free of charge.

A shipment of 14 boxes of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine landed at Doha's Hamad International Airport aboard a Qatar Airways passenger

Boeing 787 from Brussels shortly after 2000 GMT, according to AFP correspondents on site.

Authorities have not said how many doses arrived in the first shipment.

Abdullatif al-Khal, Chair of the National Health Strategic Group on COVID-19, said during a speech on state TV Monday that vaccinations would begin from Wednesday.

"The priority will be the elderly, those with [chronic conditions](#) and medical staff," he said.

Vaccinations will be administered on a voluntary basis and provided free of charge, he told AFP.

The European Union, Britain, the United States, Canada, Switzerland, Singapore, Israel and Bahrain have all green lighted the Pfizer-BioNTech jab, paving the way for inoculations to begin.

The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has proven to be 95 percent effective in global trials, where two doses are administered three weeks apart.

It needs to be stored at the ultra-low temperature of -70 degrees Celsius (-94 Fahrenheit), posing handling and storage challenges.

Qatar's [health ministry](#) "has issued the approval and registration of Pfizer and BioNTech's COVID-19 vaccine, which is one of the two vaccines (the ministry) has secured agreements to purchase," it said in a statement Monday, ahead of the delivery.

The vaccine "was approved after the Department of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Control conducted a thorough review of the vaccine and the results of clinical studies conducted on a wide range of volunteers",

the ministry added.

"Their review showed that the vaccine is safe and effective in accordance with international standards."

Qatar will also administer doses of the vaccine made by US firm Moderna Therapeutics.

The Gulf state has tested 44 percent of its population of 2.75 million and recorded 142,159 infections since the beginning of the pandemic, with the high rate attributed to aggressive testing and unsanitary accommodation for workers.

However, only 243 people have died of the virus and the rate of new infections per 100,000 for the past week was 37.7—well down from the peak.

Khal said that "starting this month and continuing throughout 2021 we will undertake the biggest [vaccine](#) program ever delivered in Qatar".

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