

Saudi announces three-phase roll out of COVID-19 vaccine

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Saudi Arabia on Tuesday announced a three-phase COVID-19 vaccination programme, as it began registering citizens and foreign residents after approving the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.

People aged over 65 as well as those with chronic ailments or at a high risk of infection will receive the vaccine in the [first stage](#), and those aged over 50 in the second, the official Saudi Press Agency said.

Everyone else will be vaccinated in the third stage, SPA said citing the [health ministry](#), without specifying the dates for each phase or how long the mass campaign would take.

The Gulf kingdom has a population of more than 34 million, according to official figures.

The ministry opened registration for the vaccination campaign through an online application called "Sehaty", and said the vaccine would be "free for all citizens and residents".

Last week, the kingdom approved the use of the vaccine developed by US pharmaceuticals giant Pfizer and its German partner BioNTec, becoming the second Gulf country after Bahrain to green-light the drug.

Britain, Canada and the United States have also approved the Pfizer-BioNTec [vaccine](#) and have already launched mass inoculation campaigns. Neighbouring Jordan green-lighted the drug late Monday.

Saudi Arabia has so far recorded more than 360,000 novel coronavirus cases, including more than 6,000 deaths—the highest in the Gulf. But the kingdom has also reported a high recovery rate.

The start of the first vaccination programmes comes with several European countries announcing new lockdowns amid spiralling infections, highlighting the long road to ending the pandemic which has killed more than 1.6 million people worldwide.

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