

UAE says Chinese vaccine 86% effective, offers few details

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A model of a coronavirus is displayed next to boxes for COVID-19 vaccines at an exhibit by Chinese pharmaceutical firm Sinopharm at the China International Fair for Trade in Services (CIFTIS) in Beijing, Saturday, Sept. 5, 2020. China said Friday, Oct. 9, 2020, that it is joining the COVID-19 vaccine alliance known as COVAX. (AP Photo/Mark Schiefelbein)

The United Arab Emirates said Wednesday a Chinese coronavirus vaccine tested in the federation of sheikhdoms is 86% effective, in a statement that provided few details but marked the first public release of information on the efficacy of the shot.

The announcement brought yet another shot into the worldwide race for a vaccine to end the pandemic, a scientific effort that has seen China and Russia compete with Western firms for an effective inoculation. While questions remain about the Sinopharm shot, already at least one country outside China plans to roll it out in a mass-vaccination campaign.

The UAE, home to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, conducted a trial beginning in September of the vaccine by Chinese state-owned pharmaceutical giant Sinopharm involving 31,000 volunteers from 125 nations. Volunteers between 18 and 60 years old received two doses of the vaccine over 28 days.

The UAE's Health and Prevention Ministry announced the results via a statement on the state-run WAM news agency, saying they "have reviewed Sinopharm CNBG's interim analysis of the Phase III trials."

"The analysis shows no serious safety concerns," the statement said, without detailing whether any participant suffered side effects.

It wasn't immediately clear if the announced results included only those taking part in the testing in the UAE or if they also include results from China and elsewhere. The statement described the vaccine as receiving "official registration" without elaborating on what that meant.

Emirati officials and Sinopharm did not respond to questions from The Associated Press.

However, calls Wednesday to SEHA, the Abu Dhabi health authority,

included an option for individuals to schedule an appointment to receive a "COVID-19 vaccine." The center was swamped with calls following the announcement on the vaccine's efficacy.

The Sinopharm vaccine has been approved for emergency use in a few countries and the company is still conducting late-stage clinical trials in 10 countries. Morocco is gearing up for an ambitious COVID-19 vaccination program, aiming to vaccinate 80% of its adults in an operation starting this month that's relying initially on the Sinopharm vaccine.

Sinopharm's shot relies on a tested technology, using a killed virus to deliver the vaccine, similar to how polio immunizations are made. Leading Western competitors, like the shot made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, use newer, less-proven technology to target the coronavirus' spike protein using RNA. The United Kingdom already has begun vaccinating people with the Pfizer shot.

Top officials in the UAE, including Dubai's ruler, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, have publicly received the shots as part of the vaccine testing.



In this April 2, 2020, file photo taken through a tinted car window, a technician takes a nasal swab for a coronavirus detection test at a drive-thru testing facility in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The United Arab Emirates said Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2020, that a Chinese coronavirus vaccine by Sinopharm tested in the federation of sheikhdoms is 86% effective, though it released few details. (AP Photo/Jon Gambrell, File)

Already, Pfizer reports its shot as being 95% effective, while another RNA candidate from Moderna appears to be 94.5% effective. Results suggest a third vaccine from Oxford University and AstraZeneca is safe and about 70% effective, but questions remain about how well it may help protect those over 55.

In transport, the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines must remain at cold

temperatures—negative 70 degrees Celsius (negative 94 degree Fahrenheit) and negative 20 degrees Celsius (negative 4 degrees Fahrenheit), respectively.

The Sinopharm vaccine is believed to be able to travel at a temperature of 2 to 8 degrees Celsius (35 to 46 degrees Fahrenheit), a major draw for areas of the world where nearly 3 billion people live without stable electricity and refrigeration. In November, the Communist Party secretary for Sinopharm said almost 1 million people in China had received its vaccine.

Meanwhile Wednesday, Abu Dhabi announced it would resume "all economic, tourism, cultural and entertainment activities in the emirate within two weeks." It attributed the decision to "successes" in halting the spread of the coronavirus.

Abu Dhabi has required those traveling into the emirate from the UAE's other six sheikhdoms to take a coronavirus test within 48 hours prior to arrival.

Since the pandemic began, the UAE has detected over 178,000 cases of the virus, with 160,000 recoveries and nearly 600 deaths. Its aggressive testing policy has seen over 17 million tests conducted in a country home to just over 9 million people.

In Iran, meanwhile, President Hassan Rouhani angrily blamed U.S. sanctions for making it difficult for Tehran to purchase medicine and health supplies amid the pandemic.

And in Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed the first shipment of doses of the Pfizer vaccine, calling it a "big day of celebration" for the country.

"I believe in this vaccine. I expect it will receive the appropriate approval in the coming days," Netanyahu said, adding that he intended to be the first to receive it. "We see the end of the pandemic."

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