

WHO: Vaccination in Asia-Pacific expected mid or late 2021

December 17 2020, by Victoria Milko



Pharmacist Ron Simono fills a syringe with a dose of the Pfizer-BioNtech COVID-19 vaccine during a vaccine clinic on Wednesday, Dec. 16, 2020, at Providence Alaska Medical Center in Anchorage, Alaska. Each glass vial contains five doses of the vaccine. The hospital, Alaska's largest, plans to vaccinate 485 people this week. (Loren Holmes/Anchorage Daily News via AP, Pool)

The World Health Organization said Thursday that countries in the Asia-Pacific region are not guaranteed to have early access to COVID-19 shots and urged them to adopt a long-term approach to the pandemic.

"The development of safe and effective vaccines is one thing. Producing them in adequate quantities and reaching everyone who needs them is another," WHO Regional Director Dr. Takeshi Kasai told reporters in the Indonesian capital, Jakarta.

While some countries that have independent [vaccine](#) purchase agreements might start vaccination campaigns in the coming months, others could see vaccination begin in the middle or late 2021, said Dr. Socorro Escalante, WHO's coordinator for [essential medicines](#) and health technologies.

"It's important to emphasize that most, if not all, the countries in the Western Pacific region are a part of the COVAX Facility," said Escalante. "Within the COVAX Facility we are expecting that the vaccines will be coming in on the [second quarter](#) of 2021."

COVAX was set up by WHO, vaccines alliance GAVI and CEPI, a global coalition to fight epidemics, in an effort to ensure equitable access to vaccines across the world.

WHO representatives also urged that high-risk groups should be prioritized for vaccination as vaccines will only be available in limited quantities.

The health agency warned that mass vaccination will not stop the virus and that governments need to adopt a long-term mindset and approach when new cases are detected, including increased testing, contact tracing and quarantine measures.

"The virus does not rest, and so therefore we need to continue with our responses ensuring that they are implemented consistently," said WHO Regional Emergency Director Dr. Babatunde Olowokure.

Olowokure also appealed to [younger people](#)—which represent growing number of new confirmed cases in the region —to adhere to social distancing and other measures.

The WHO Western Pacific Region is home to almost 1.9 billion people across 37 countries and territories.

Globally, the virus has infected more than 74 million people and killed more than 1.6 million. More than 41.9 million people have recovered from the disease.

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Citation: WHO: Vaccination in Asia-Pacific expected mid or late 2021 (2020, December 17) retrieved 4 May 2024 from

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