

Albania carries out 1st vaccinations with donated doses

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Albanian prime minister Edi Rama receives the first dose of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at a vaccination center in Tirana, Albania, Monday, Jan. 11, 2021. Rama was among the first to take the COVID-19 vaccine which the country has received from an undisclosed European Union member country. The Prime Minister said he was "not authorized" to say which EU country had provided 975 vaccines. (AP Photo)

Albania kicked off its coronavirus vaccination program on Monday with doses received from an undisclosed European Union nation, making sure that the prime minister was among the first to receive a shot.

Prime Minister Edi Rama said he was "not authorized" to say which EU country had provided 975 doses to the Balkan nation. Albania's main vaccination campaign is due to start next week.

Rama was inoculated after the head of the infectious diseases hospital that treats most people infected with the virus. Rama said he did it to show that it "not only is safe but that it is the weapon to kill this invisible enemy."

Rama repeated complaints made by several countries in the Western Balkans that the European Union has left them behind in its vaccination rollout. The vaccinations Albania gave Monday are sure to spark some envy in other Balkan countries.

"The strategy and direction set from the EU to invest in the COVAX scheme has proved to be undefined in time," Rama said, referring to an international initiative to ensure that vaccines are available in lower-income countries.

"If we waited for COVAX we still would be waiting and no one knows how long that would last," he added.

The government has contracted to get 500,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, of which the first 10,000 are to arrive next week.



Albanian prime minister Edi Rama prepares to receive the first dose of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at a vaccination center in Tirana, Albania, Monday, Jan. 11, 2021. Rama was among the first to take the COVID-19 vaccine which the country has received from an undisclosed European Union member country. The Prime Minister said he was "not authorized" to say which EU country had provided 975 vaccines. (AP Photo)

Rama said next week Albania will also give "a symbolic number of vaccines" to neighboring Kosovo for the "frontline medical personnel."

"In this case, it is important to think not like the EU, but to think that we are not alone, because Kosova and Albania are one in joy and trouble," Rama said after getting his shot.

Health Minister Ogerta Manastirliu said personnel at the country's four infectious diseases hospitals would be the first to get the vaccine, followed by the rest of the country's 23,000 health personnel and people over 75.

The vaccination of these groups is expected to be completed in a few months. The [vaccine](#) is not mandatory.

Albania has had 1,247 virus-related deaths and 63,971 confirmed cases as of Monday.

Authorities have imposed many lockdown measures to contain the pandemic, including a 10 p.m. to 6 a.m. curfew, mandatory mask wearing, restrictions on indoor gatherings and online classes for university students.

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