

Brazil's late and rocky start on vaccinations fuels public ire

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Brazil's newly launched vaccination campaign against COVID-19 has gotten off to a late and rocky start—as the country is hammered by a second wave of the disease, it is already close to running out of vaccine, syringes and other vital equipment, according to scientists who blame the government of Jair Bolsonaro.

The campaign only began on Monday in the country of 212 million, weeks after the United States and European countries launched their vaccination programs.

The late rollout, hampered by short supplies, has sparked growing public ire, with widespread complaints about people being vaccinated out of turn.

Thousands of people in several cities mounted protests this weekend demanding Bolsonaro's ouster.

The inoculation drive so far involves six million doses of the CoronaVac vaccine from China's Sinovac, and two million of the British AstraZeneca-Oxford jab, which arrived Friday after several delays from India where they are made.

The Butantan Institute in Sao Paulo, associated with Sinovac, has also received authorization for another 4.8 million doses of CoronaVac.

Warnings of delays

But no sooner had the vaccination program begun than professionals sounded the alarm about delays.

This comes at a time when the pandemic has been surging, claiming more than 1,000 lives a day and more than 215,000 to date, second only to the US total of over 415,000.

Any interruption in the supply chain could bring the vaccination program to a sudden halt, according to Isabella Ballalai, vice president of the Brazilian Society for Immunology (SBIM).

She denounced what she called "the incompetence of the Health

Ministry" and said [greater transparency](#) is needed to restore public confidence.

Bolsonaro, who has long played down the seriousness of COVID-19, on Friday cast doubt on the effectiveness of vaccines.

The government acknowledged this month that it lacked 30 million syringes for the first phase of its national plan, which aims—over an unclear timeline—to immunize 50 million people.

On top of the distribution challenges in this vast country, complaints have arisen in several cities about people getting vaccinated even when not in a priority group.

'Absolute negligence'

In Manaus, the capital of Amazonas state, where hospitals are overflowing with COVID patients and oxygen supplies are critically short, the outcry of complaints led to a 24-hour suspension of vaccinations.

The Butantan Institute has said it expects eventually to be able to produce 40 million doses of the CoronaVac; the Fiocruz foundation, which has links to the Health Ministry, is supposed to produce the AstraZeneca vaccine but has warned of [supply chain](#) problems.

Many experts attribute the delays to Bolsonaro's frequent criticism of the CoronaVac vaccine, which they say has offended the Chinese.

The only explanation, said Margareth Dalcolmo, a pulmonologist and researcher at Fiocruz, is "absolute negligence, the diplomatic incompetence of Brazil."

Bolsonaro on Thursday rejected such criticism, saying the problem "is bureaucratic and not political."

Rising frustration

Thomaz Favaro, a political analyst with Control Risks, pointed a finger at the government, which he said "delayed in signing agreements with the laboratories."

Brazil has yet to reach agreement to purchase either the Pfizer-BioNTech or the Janssen [vaccine](#).

But Favaro said Bolsonaro will eventually have to pay a political price, adding, "the delay in the [vaccination campaign](#) has a serious impact on [economic recovery](#), and that will increase people's frustration."

A new poll Friday showed Bolsonaro's popularity is at its lowest point—31 percent—since he came to office in January 2019.

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