

Denmark leads EU in COVID vaccinations with smooth roll-out

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Denmark leads the EU in vaccinations against the novel coronavirus thanks to a swift and smooth roll-out, and even more people would have got the jab if it had more available doses.

So far, 2.2 percent of Denmark's population of 5.8 million has been

vaccinated since the campaign began on December 27.

Unlike other countries which have, amid delivery concerns, set aside half their [vaccine](#) allotment to ensure patients get their second dose, the Scandinavian country has barrelled ahead and used up its first Pfizer-BioNTech doses.

"The government's clear position is that the moment the vaccines touch Danish soil is the moment they have to be used," said Denmark's Social Democratic Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen.

With well-oiled logistics and a swift campaign in nursing homes—where almost all who wanted the vaccine have now received it—Denmark tops the EU in vaccinations, far ahead of Italy and Slovenia and at a pace almost three times higher than the EU average, according to data compiled by AFP.

As of Thursday, 129,170 people in Denmark had received their first jab.

With a robust welfare state, the country also attributes the strong start to its universal healthcare system, governed by easily-mobilised local regions.

"Our set-up makes it possible to have rapid distribution (of the vaccine) and we have a very good IT infrastructure which enables us to register every person who receives the vaccine," Jens Lundgren, a University of Copenhagen professor who specialises in infectious diseases, told AFP.

Targeting [care homes](#), where the injection is given on-site, has enabled the vaccination campaign to get off to a strong start, according to epidemiologist Lone Simonsen, a professor at the University of Roskilde.

'Relieved' to get jab

To maximise the number of people getting their first dose, Denmark has, like several other countries, also authorised the second dose to be delayed by up to six weeks in some cases, instead of the recommended three.

The WHO has approved the move despite some reticence from the manufacturer.

In Roskilde, at the Gadstrup vaccination centre set up in a former military building, 75-year-old Mikael Jensen leaves with an appointment to receive his second dose in three weeks.

Considered at risk after a kidney transplant, he tells AFP he's "relieved" to have got the vaccine.

Nurses here vaccinate one patient every 12 minutes, the doctor in charge of the centre, Kim Christiansen, said.

Trine Holgersen, head of the local Zeeland healthcare services, said everyone in the region will be guaranteed their second dose on time. Zeeland will begin administering second doses on Monday.

"It's in the freezer and we know exactly where to be, at what time, which person," she said.

Nurses in Denmark have been able to squeeze six doses of vaccine out of each vial, instead of the expected five, which has also helped them speed things along.

Race against the variant

Denmark's strategy is aimed at giving the first inoculations to frontline healthcare workers and those in risk groups.

It hopes to have all adult Danes who want the injection—around 80 percent, according to opinion polls—vaccinated by June.

"Our goal is to be able to vaccinate 100,000 Danes a day when we have enough vaccines," the prime minister wrote in a recent Instagram post.

Denmark on Thursday began administering the new Moderna vaccine. For that one, the country has decided to set aside half of the doses.

In addition to potential supply problems, the vaccination rate may also slow down now as the remainder of people have to make their own way to a vaccination centre, as opposed to care home residents who received it in their home.

"We have the infrastructure but people have to go to the vaccination centre, so that could drastically slow down the statistics," Lundgren noted.

Concerns are also rising in Denmark about the British variant of the novel [coronavirus](#), reported to be more contagious.

So far more than 200 cases have been detected in the country.

"With the new variant, it's a race between its spread and the need to vaccinate," said epidemiologist Simonsen.

In mainland Denmark, excluding Greenland and the Faroe Islands, 183,801 cases of COVID-19 and 1,623 deaths have been reported.

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