

Dutch authorities to quickly begin vaccinating health staff

January 2 2021



Police and ambulance personnel line up in front of the Royal Palace on Dam Square just before midnight in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Thursday, Dec. 31, 2020. As the world says goodbye to 2020, a year ruined by the coronavirus, there will be countdowns and live performances, but no massed jubilant crowds in traditional gathering spots like the Champs Elysees in Paris and New York City's Times Square this New Year's Eve. (AP Photo/Peter Dejong)

The Dutch government announced Saturday that it will begin vaccinating thousands of frontline health care workers as soon as possible to ease pressure on hospitals hit by coronavirus-related staffing shortages.

The announcement marked an [abrupt change](#) to a policy that had prioritized vaccinations of care home workers and carers for other [vulnerable people](#)—and not for hospital acute care workers. The policy had also drawn criticism because vaccinations were not due to start until Jan. 8, leaving the Netherlands lagging behind countries that have already begun.

"The worrying situation in acute care is in part due to the illness of care workers, often corona-related," the government said in a statement. "Acute care staff will, therefore, be part of the first group that is eligible for vaccination."

It was not clear when vaccinations would start. Ernst Kuipers, chairman of the country's acute care network, said it may not be possible to begin ahead of the planned Jan. 8 date.

"Distributing the [vaccine](#) that has to be stored at minus-70 degrees and is in batches of 1,000 will take a number of days," he told NPO Radio 1.

The Netherlands is in the midst of a five-week tough lockdown imposed when infection rates were spiking across the country. In recent days, [infection rates](#) have been edging lower; on Friday, 8,215 people tested positive for COVID-19.

However, [health officials](#) have warned that the peak in new hospital and intensive care unit admissions has not yet been reached in the latest surge and capacity problems have been compounded by staff illness.

The government said that it wants to clarify by Monday the earliest

possible date to begin the vaccinations. It said the first shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine would likely be administered in 10 hospitals spread across the country.

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