

EU defends its slow vaccine roll-out

January 4 2021



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The European Commission on Monday said its COVID-19 vaccine strategy will get the EU past "bumps on the road" that have slowed a roll-out of jabs across the bloc.

"It's obvious that such a complex endeavour is always going to bring with

it difficulties," spokesman Eric Mamer told journalists.

EU countries started inoculations on December 27 with the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine, but progress has been much slower than in the United States, Britain or Israel.

The vaccine—developed in Germany—is the only one currently authorised for use in the European Union, whereas the United States uses it alongside one made by American firm Moderna, and Britain as of Monday also started using one by UK outfit AstraZeneca.

While the US, Britain and Israel have each already given vaccines to more than a million of their citizens, EU countries have been lagging far behind. France, for instance, has given a first jab to just over 500 people. Germany has started immunising 200,000.

The European Commission emphasised it had bought access to "almost two billion doses" of six potential vaccines—four times the population of the entire European Union.

But the European Medicines Agency has not said how many of the other vaccines were safe and effective enough to be used, although it has said it could decide on the Moderna vaccine later Monday.

"We don't put all our eggs in one basket," said another Commission spokesman, Stefan De Keersmaecker.

He said that the Commission was currently negotiating to get more doses of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine, above the 300 million already secured. He did not give a figure.

De Keersmaecker noted, however, that "one of the main bottlenecks that we are all experiencing now is the production capacity".

Mamer also said that the Commission was not responsible for each EU member state's roll-out.

"It is the member states who then decide whether they want to buy a specific vaccine and how many doses of that [vaccine](#). It is not us," he said.

"I don't think that the issue is really the number of vaccines, it is the fact that we are at the beginning of a roll-out."

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Citation: EU defends its slow vaccine roll-out (2021, January 4) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-eu-defends-vaccine-roll-out.html>

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