

Moderna jab 'protective' against variants as global borders tighten

January 25 2021



The US was set to join France, Israel, Sweden and others in pulling up the drawbridge to certain arrivals

US biotech firm Moderna announced Monday that its vaccine should protect against alarming new coronavirus variants, as the pandemic saw borders tighten worldwide and the European Union voice anger over delays to millions of vaccine doses.

In the face of deepening fears over new strains, Moderna offered good news from lab studies of the variants first identified in the United Kingdom and South Africa.

"We are encouraged by these new data, which reinforce our confidence that the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine should be protective against these newly detected variants," said CEO Stéphane Bancel.

Out of caution, Moderna said it will carry out more tests adding a second booster of its vaccine—to make three shots in total.

Tensions over prolonged virus restrictions were meanwhile running high, with a second night of riots erupting in the Netherlands in protest at a curfew.

Riot police were clashing with protesters in Amsterdam, the port city of Rotterdam and several other cities.

Mexico buys Sputnik jabs

Europe as a whole is dealing with the latest blow to its vaccination campaign, after British-Swedish drugs company AstraZeneca warned that it will not be able to meet its promised targets on EU shipments—a week after US group Pfizer said it was also cutting delivery volumes.



Concern is rising over potentially more dangerous variants of the coronavirus

The AstraZeneca delay "is not acceptable to the European Union," said European Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides.

"The European Union will take any action required to protect its citizens and rights."

Orders for Russia's Sputnik V shot, however, are gaining pace, with Mexico agreeing Monday to buy 24 million doses.

Its developers claim the jab is more than 90 percent effective, although the vaccine was registered before large-scale clinical trials and has yet to

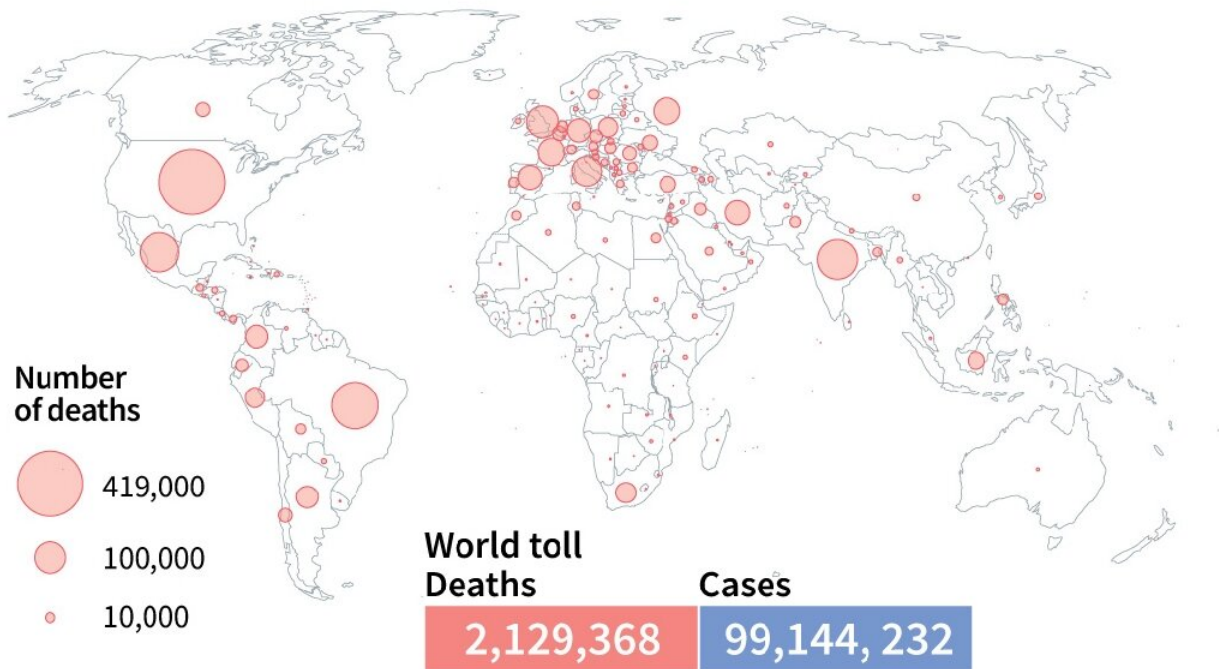
be approved by Mexico's health regulator.

And Ukraine—which will potentially use jabs provided by UN scheme Covax, as well as China's CoronaVac—announced it would "soon" obtain a million doses to kick off a vaccination campaign.

In Geneva, the United Nations put out a grim reminder that the virus is also taking a huge toll on global jobs.

Spread of the coronavirus

January 25, at 1100 GMT



Source: AFP count based on official tolls



World map showing the number of Covid-19 deaths by country, as of Jan 25 at 1100 GMT

The UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) said the losses were equivalent to 255 million full-time jobs, or "approximately four times greater than the number lost during the 2009 global financial crisis".

"This has been the most severe crisis for the world of work since the Great Depression of the 1930s," ILO chief Guy Ryder said.

The long-term economic impact was also worrying anti-poverty group Oxfam, which said the emergency was aggravating inequality.

"The world's 10 richest men have seen their combined wealth increase by half a trillion dollars since the pandemic began—more than enough to pay for a COVID-19 vaccine for everyone in the world," the group said.

Pulling up the drawbridge

The United States was preparing to join France, Israel, Sweden and others in restricting entry to certain international travellers, amid deep concern about new strains of COVID-19 which appear to spread far more quickly.



US biotechnology firm Moderna said its Covid-19 vaccine would remain protective against variants first identified in the United Kingdom and South Africa

"It's up to us to show that we are civic-minded," Spaniard Claudio Barraza told AFP at Paris's main international airport, after new rules on tests for arrivals came into force.

US President Joe Biden was due Monday to reimpose a ban on most non-US citizens who have been in Britain, Brazil, Ireland and much of Europe, as well as adding South Africa to the list, a senior White House official said.

Since emerging in late 2019, COVID-19 has killed more than 2.1 million

people, with over 99 million cases registered, according to an AFP tally from official figures.

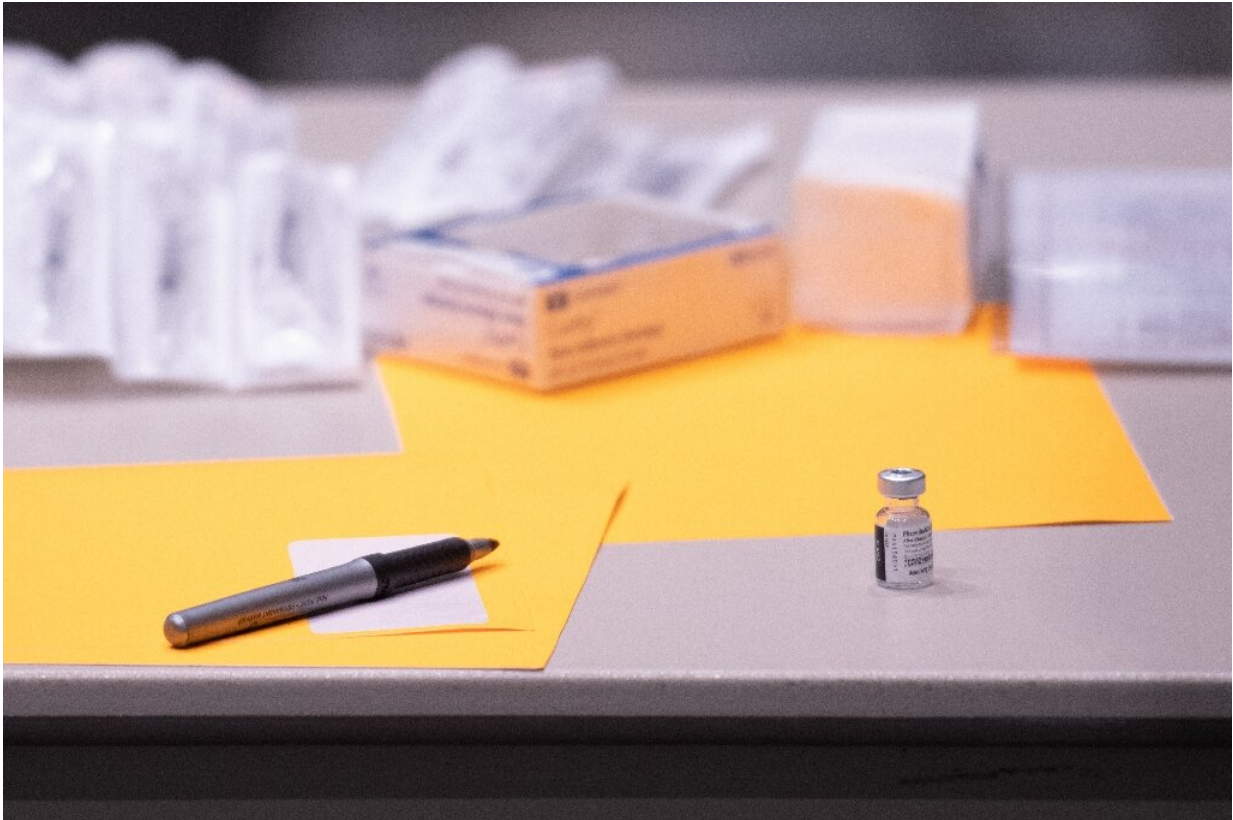
On Sunday, France started demanding a negative PCR test for arrivals by sea and air from EU neighbours.

Sweden said it would prohibit entry from neighbouring Norway for three weeks, after cases of the more infectious British strain were detected in Oslo.

And Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel was "closing the skies hermetically, except for rare exceptions" to both arrivals and departures for a week.



Britain is imploring people to get tested



Vaccinations are the only way out of the pandemic, doctors say, but their roll-out has stuttered in many countries

'Civil war'

But government action to curtail the virus' spread can still face stiff opposition.

Before the unrest on Dutch streets resumed late Monday, Prime Minister Mark Rutte had already condemned "criminal violence" by anti-curfew

protesters who went on the rampage.

Police arrested 250 people after using water cannon and tear gas during demonstrations in Amsterdam, Eindhoven and other towns on Sunday.

Eindhoven mayor John Jorritsma said that if the country continued "down this path, then I think we are heading for civil war".

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