

## South Africa buys 1.5 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine

January 7 2021, by Andrew Meldrum

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Medical workers prepare a COVID positive patient for a CT Scan at a clinic in Johannesburg Sunday, Dec. 27, 2020. South Africa's COVID-19 spike has taken the country to more than 1 million confirmed cases with hospitals reaching capacity and no sign of the new surge reaching a peak. (AP Photo/Shiraz Mohamed)

South Africa says it will import 1.5 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to inoculate the country's health workers. This is South Africa's first announcement of the purchase of a COVID-19 vaccine as its cases soar.

The first 1 million doses will be delivered later this month from the Serum Institute of India, followed by an additional 500,000 doses in February, Health Minister Zwelini Mkhize announced Thursday.

South Africa is battling a dramatic resurgence of COVID-19 that is quickly outstripping its first peak. It announced record highs of 21,832 new confirmed cases and 844 deaths late Wednesday.

Some of South Africa's hospitals are already reporting that they are at capacity. The rapid spread of the disease in recent weeks has been driven by a new, more infectious variant of the virus, according to medical experts.

The country of 60 million people has reported by far the most cases of the coronavirus in Africa, with more than 1.1 million confirmed infections, including 31,368 deaths, representing more than 30% of all cases on the continent of 1.3 billion.

South Africa is not the first country on the 54-nation continent to announce a vaccine deal. Kenya's health minister on Wednesday said the country is expected to start receiving 24 million doses next month of the AstraZeneca vaccine. And last month, Morocco announced it had ordered 65 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines from China's Sinopharm and Britain's AstraZeneca.



Members of the Saaberie Chishty Burial Society prepare the body of a person who died from COVID-19 at the Avalon Cemetery in Lenasia, Johannesburg Saturday Dec. 26, 2020. South Africa's health minister has announced an "alarming rate of spread" in the country, with more than 14,000 new confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 400 deaths reported Wednesday. It was the largest single-day increase in cases. (AP Photo/Shiraz Mohamed)

South Africa has 1.25 million health care workers in public and private hospitals, and the government has decided they should have first priority in getting protection from COVID-19, Mkhize said.

The department of health has purchased the vaccine directly from the manufacturer in India, he said.



South Africa's drug regulatory body is "fine-tuning and aligning all the regulations processes to ensure that there are no unnecessary delays or regulatory impediments to activate this rollout," Mkhize said.

Earlier this week, he said South Africa expects to get vaccines to inoculate an estimated 6 million people, or 10% of the population, from the international COVAX initiative starting in April. He said the government intends to vaccinate 67% of the population by the end of 2021, which many experts say is an unrealistic goal.



Members of the Saaberie Chishty Burial Society prepare the grave for the burial of a person who died from COVID-19 at the Avalon Cemetery in Lenasia, Johannesburg Saturday Dec. 26, 2020. South Africa's health minister has announced an "alarming rate of spread" in the country, with more than 14,000



new confirmed coronavirus cases and more than 400 deaths reported Wednesday. It was the largest single-day increase in cases. (AP Photo/Shiraz Mohamed)



A freshly-dug grave sits at the Motherwell Cemetery in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Friday, Dec. 4, 2020. Health Minister Zweli Mkhize announced on Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2020 that the country is now experiencing a Covid-19 pandemic second wave. (AP Photo/Theo Jeftha)



A grave digger looks into a grave at the Motherwell Cemetery in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, Friday, Dec. 4, 2020. Health Minister Zweli Mkhize announced on Wednesday, Dec. 9, 2020 that the country is now experiencing a Covid-19 pandemic second wave. (AP Photo/Theo Jeftha)

"We urge the public to be patient with us as we continue to engage manufacturers (for the purchase of additional vaccines). ... We will not neglect our responsibility to protect lives and also fight this pandemic," Mkhize said.

Mkhize told a parliamentary committee Thursday that South Africa expects to spend the equivalent of \$1.4 billion to acquire vaccines to inoculate two-thirds of the country's population. He said the majority of the vaccines will come from AstraZeneca, which will cost approximately

\$3.60 per dose in comparison to Moderna's cost of \$36.40 per dose. He said the state will purchase the vaccines and expects to partner with South Africa's private health care companies and possible international donors.

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