

Sri Lanka approves vaccine amid warnings of virus spread

January 22 2021, by Krishan Francis



Sri Lankan municipal health workers take a swab sample from a man to test for COVID-19 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Thursday, Jan. 21, 2021. Sri Lanka on Thursday re-opened the country for tourists after keeping the doors closed for the visitors for nearly 10 months due to the COVID-19. (AP Photo/Eranga Jayawardena)

Sri Lanka on Friday approved the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine for COVID-19 amid warnings from doctors that front-line health workers

should be quickly inoculated to stop the system from collapsing.

Minister for Pharmaceutical Production and Regulation Channa Jayasumana said the British vaccine has been approved for emergency use, the first in Sri Lanka, while several other candidates are in the pipeline at the National Medicines Regulatory Authority.

It is unknown when Sri Lanka will be getting the vaccine.

"Hundreds of [health care workers](#) have tested positive in several hospitals. When you have one positive case, about 10 health workers will need to be sent to quarantine. System is collapsing day by day," said Dr. Haritha Aluthge from the Government Medical Officers' Association, the largest doctors' trade union in the country.

"Vaccines need to be given quickly to keep the health workers' morals up and we need [health workers](#) to treat patients," Aluthge said.

After two months during which no community cases were reported, a random test on a factory worker in October led to the detection of a new cluster. At about the same time, the owner of an eatery near the country's main fish market alerted authorities about a rise in the sale of paracetamol, an indication people were suffering from fevers. Testing of fish vendors detected a second cluster.



Sri Lankan municipal health workers take swab samples to test for COVID-19 as other queue in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Thursday, Jan. 21, 2021. Sri Lanka on Thursday re-opened the country for tourists after keeping the doors closed for the visitors for nearly 10 months due to the COVID-19. (AP Photo/Eranga Jayawardena)



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In over three months since, Sri Lanka has reported more than 52,000 new patients and 260 deaths. Between 500 to 900 new cases are being reported daily.

Doctors blame complacency.

"We were a success story, but the issue was we all as Sri Lankans forgot COVID-19 was existing. We thought that COVID was over," said Senal Fernando, secretary of the doctors' union.

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