

UK regulators approve use of 3rd vaccine against coronavirus

January 8 2021, by Danica Kirka and Jill Lawless



A man wearing a face covering walks past the London Eye in London, Friday, Jan. 8, 2021. Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson has ordered a new national lockdown for England which means people will only be able to leave their homes for limited reasons, with measures expected to stay in place until mid-February. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)

Britain has authorized a coronavirus vaccine developed by Moderna, the third to be licensed for use in the country as it ramps up a vaccination program critical to lifting the U.K. out of the pandemic.

The Department of Health said Friday that the vaccine meets the regulator's "strict standards of safety, efficacy and quality." Britain has now ordered a total of 17 million doses that will have been delivered by the spring.

"Vaccines are the key to releasing us all from the grip of this pandemic, and today's news is yet another important step towards ending lockdown and returning to normal life," Business Secretary Alok Sharma said.

So far, Britain has inoculated 1.5 million people with the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford University-AstraZeneca vaccines. It plans to vaccinate some 15 million people by mid-February.

The authorization comes as the need for such help grows ever greater. London Mayor Sadiq Khan declared a "major incident," as the rapid spread of the virus threatens to overwhelm the capital's hospitals, with cases now exceeding 1,000 per 100,000. Other [emergency services](#) are also under strain, with hundreds of firefighters now driving ambulances, for example.

"Our heroic doctors, nurses and NHS staff are doing an amazing job, but with cases rising so rapidly, our hospitals are at risk of being overwhelmed," Khan said. "The stark reality is that we will run out of beds for patients in the next couple of weeks unless the spread of the virus slows down drastically."



Office vacancy signs on a building, near St Paul's Cathedral during England's third national lockdown to curb the spread of coronavirus, in London, Friday, Jan. 8, 2021. (Dominic Lipinski/PA via AP)

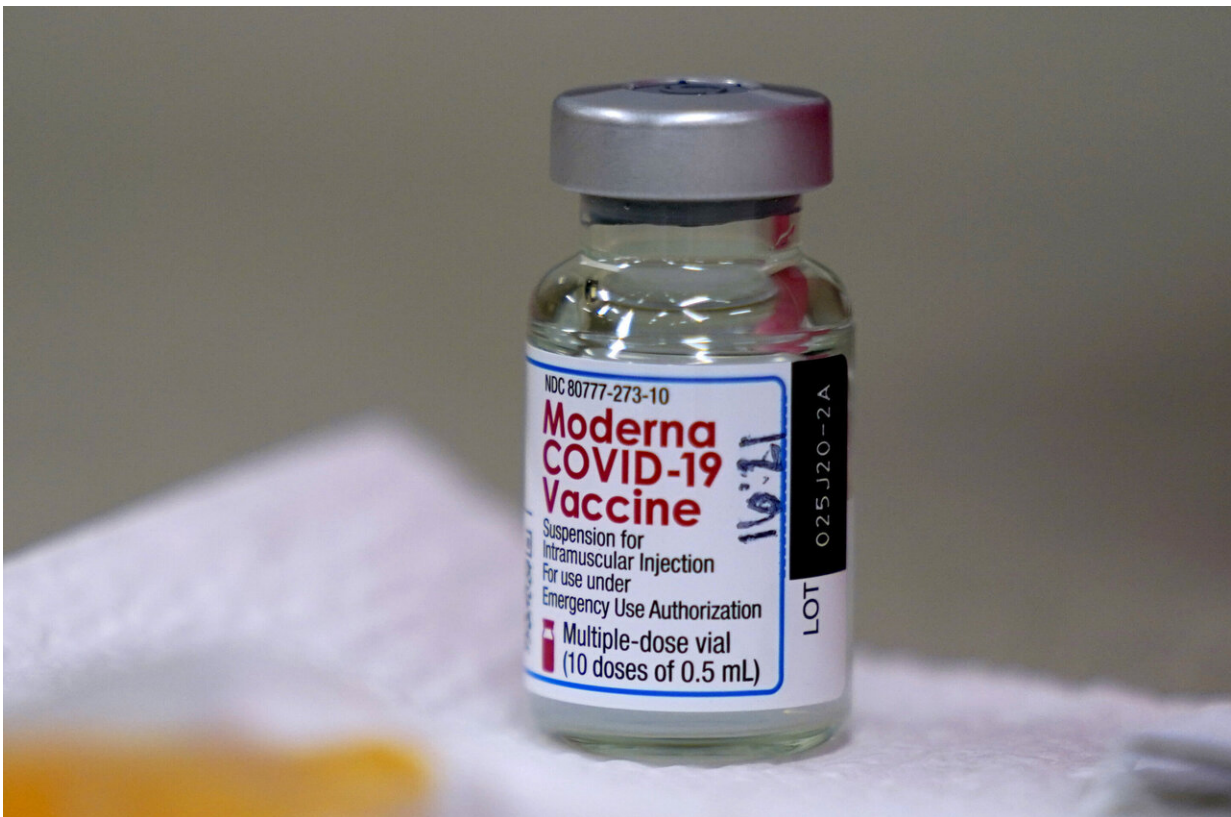
Khan said the city was at a crisis point. A major incident is defined as being "beyond the scope of business-as-usual operations" and as one which is likely a risk to life and welfare. It requires special arrangements between more than one emergency agency, the mayor's office said.

"If we do not take immediate action now, our NHS could be overwhelmed and more people will die," he said.

NHS England Chief Executive Simon Stevens said Thursday that the pressures facing hospitals in London and the southeast of England are so

acute that the Nightingale hospital at the ExCel London will be opened next week.

The [hospital](#) was one of several built in the spring to help during the pandemic, but wasn't used. They were named after Florence Nightingale, widely considered to be the founder of modern nursing.



In this file photo dated Wednesday, Dec. 30, 2020, a bottle of Moderna COVID-19 vaccine on a table before being utilised in Topeka, USA. Britain has authorized a coronavirus vaccine developed by Moderna, the third to be licensed for use in the country. The Department of Health said Friday, Jan. 8, 2021 that the vaccine meets the regulator's "strict standards of safety, efficacy and quality." Britain has ordered 10 million doses of the vaccine, though it is not expected to be delivered to the U.K. until spring. So far Britain has inoculated 1,5 million people with two other vaccines. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel, File)



A woman wearing a face mask, walks across Westminster Bridge past the Houses of Parliament in London, Friday, Jan. 8, 2021. Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson has ordered a new national lockdown for England which means people will only be able to leave their homes for limited reasons, with measures expected to stay in place until mid-February. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)



A couple wear face coverings as they stroll past illuminated trees on the Southbank in London, Friday, Jan. 8, 2021. Britain's Prime Minister Boris Johnson has ordered a new national lockdown for England which means people will only be able to leave their homes for limited reasons, with measures expected to stay in place until mid-February. (AP Photo/Frank Augstein)

"The entirety of the health service in London is mobilizing to do everything it possibly can, but the infections, the rate of growth in admissions, that is what collectively the country has got to get under control," Stevens said.

The U.K. is recording virus-related deaths on a par with some of the worst days early in the pandemic. On Thursday, government figures showed that another 1,162 people were reported to have died within 28

days of testing positive for the virus.

The U.K.'s total virus-related death toll is now 78,508. According to figures compiled by Johns Hopkins University, the U.K. has the most COVID-related deaths in Europe and the fifth highest number in the world.

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