

# Vaccination campaign picks up speed around the world

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82-year-old Brian Pinker receives the Oxford University/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine from nurse Sam Foster at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford, England, Monday, Jan. 4, 2021. Pinker, a retired maintenance manager received the first injection of the new vaccine developed by between Oxford University and drug giant AstraZeneca. (Steve Parsons/Pool Photo via AP)

The drive to vanquish the coronavirus gained ground Monday when Britain introduced another COVID-19 vaccine and the first people inoculated in the U.S. began rolling up their sleeves for their second and final dose.

Authorities in France and elsewhere in Europe, meanwhile, came under fire for slow rollouts and delays.

Helen Cordova, an intensive care nurse, got her second dose of the Pfizer vaccine at Kaiser Permanente Los Angeles Medical Center along with other doctors and nurses, the prescribed three weeks after they received their first shot at the start of the U.S. vaccination campaign.

"I'm really excited because that means I'm just that much closer to having the immunity and being a little safer when I come to work and, you know, just being around my family," Cordova said.

As of Monday, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that nearly 4.6 million shots have been dispensed in the U.S., after a slow and uneven start to the campaign, marked by a confusion, a multitude of logistical hurdle and a patchwork of approaches by state and local governments.

Over the weekend, U.S. government officials reported that vaccinations had accelerated significantly, with Dr. Anthony Fauci, the nation's top infectious-disease expert, saying 1.5 million shots were administered in 72 hours, or about 500,000 per day.

Britain, meanwhile, became the first nation to start using the COVID-19 vaccine developed by AstraZeneca and Oxford University, ramping up its nationwide inoculation campaign amid soaring infection rates blamed on a new and seemingly more contagious variant of the virus.

Brian Pinker, an 82-year-old dialysis patient, received the first shot at Oxford University Hospital, saying in a statement: "I can now really look forward to celebrating my 48th wedding anniversary."

Britain's vaccination program began Dec. 8 with the shot developed by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech.

The country has recorded more than 50,000 new coronavirus infections a day over the past six days, and deaths have climbed past 75,000, one of the worst tolls in Europe.



Chief nurse Sam Foster holds a vial of the Oxford University/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, at the Churchill Hospital in Oxford, England, Monday, Jan. 4, 2021. England's National Health Service says a retired maintenance manager has received the first injection of the new vaccine developed by between Oxford

University and drug giant AstraZeneca. Dialysis patient Brian Pinker became the very first person to be vaccinated by the chief nurse at Oxford University Hospital. (Steve Parsons/Pool Photo via AP)

Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced a wave of near-lockdowns the weekend before Christmas and warned on Monday that "tough, tough" weeks lie ahead and that tighter restrictions are coming soon: "If you look at the numbers, there's no question we will have to take tougher measures."

Israel appears to be among the world leaders in the vaccination campaign, inoculating over 1 million people, or roughly 12% of its population, in just over two weeks. The effort has been boosted by a high-quality, centralized health system and the country's small size and concentrated population.

Elsewhere, France's cautious approach appears to have backfired, leaving just a few hundred people vaccinated after the first week and rekindling anger over the government's handling of the pandemic.

The slow rollout has been blamed on mismanagement, staffing shortages over the holidays and a complex consent policy designed to accommodate vaccine skepticism among the French.

"It's a state scandal," Jean Rottner, president of the Grand-Est region of eastern France, said on France-2 television. "Getting vaccinated is becoming more complicated than buying a car."

Health Minister Olivier Veran promised that by the end of Monday, several thousand people will have been vaccinated, with the tempo picking up through the week. But that would still leave France well

behind its neighbors.

French media broadcast charts comparing vaccine figures in various countries: In France, a nation of 67 million people, just 516 people were vaccinated in the first six days, according to the French Health Ministry. Germany's first-week total surpassed 200,000, and Italy's was over 100,000. Millions have been vaccinated in the U.S. and China.

The European Union likewise faced growing criticism about the slow rollout of COVID-19 shots across the 27-nation bloc of 450 million inhabitants.

EU Commission spokesman Eric Mamer said the main problem "is an issue of production capacity, an issue that everybody is facing."

The EU has sealed six vaccine contracts with a variety of manufacturers. But only the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has been approved for use so far across the EU. The EU's drug regulators are expected to decide on Wednesday whether to recommend authorizing the Moderna vaccine.



A health worker takes a nasal swab sample of a man to test for COVID-19 in Ahmedabad, India, Monday, Jan. 4, 2021. India on Sunday authorized two COVID-19 vaccines, paving the way for a huge inoculation program to stem the coronavirus pandemic in the world's second most populous country. (AP Photo/Ajit Solanki)

Aspects of Britain's vaccination plans have also spurred controversy.

British health authorities want to give the first dose to as many people as possible right away, rather than holding vaccine in reserve to ensure recipients get their second shot on time a few weeks later. The plan requires stretching out the time between doses to as much as 12 weeks.

While two doses are required to fully protect against COVID-19, one

dose still offers a high level of protection.

In the U.S., Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar dismissed such a strategy, saying on ABC's "Good Morning America" that the scientific data "just isn't there" to support that approach.

The U.S. has been holding back large amounts of vaccine for fear of manufacturing delays that could hold up the required second dose.

Fauci acknowledged over the weekend that "we are not where we want to be" when it comes to the vaccination drive, but he expressed optimism that the momentum will pick up by mid-January. He said President-elect Joe Biden's goal of vaccinating 100 million people in his first 100 days in office is "realistic."

On Sunday, India, the world's second-most populous country, authorized its first two COVID-19 vaccines—the Oxford-AstraZeneca one and another developed by an Indian company. The move paves the way for a huge inoculation program in the desperately poor nation of 1.4 billion people.

India has confirmed more than 10.3 million cases of the virus, second in the world behind the U.S. It also has reported about 150,000 deaths.

Neither of the approved vaccines requires the ultra-cold storage that some others do. Instead, they can be kept in refrigerators, making them easier to handle in less developed parts of the world.

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