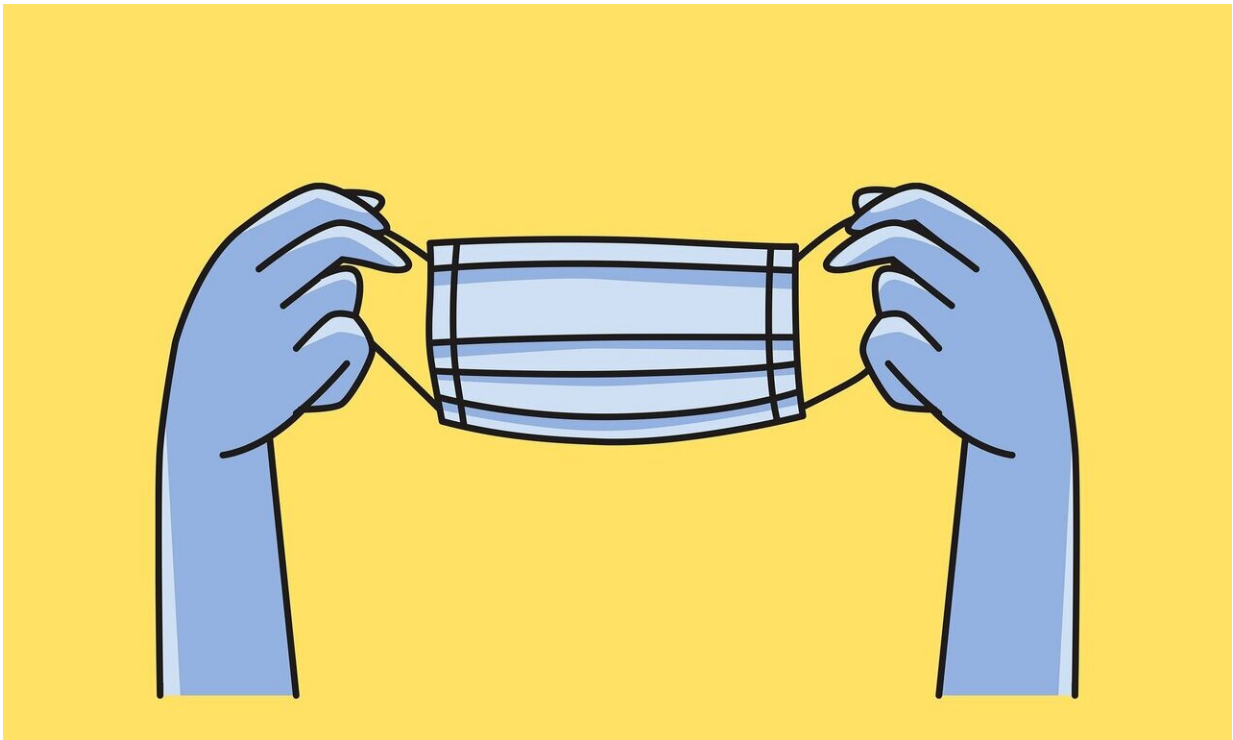


BioNTech says 'committed' to supplying Taiwan with vaccine

February 18 2021



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Germany's BioNTech said Thursday it still intends to provide Taiwan with coronavirus vaccine doses after the island's health chief warned "political pressure" had scuppered a deal with the company.

Taiwanese health minister Chen Shih-chung said Wednesday that

negotiations with the German firm to acquire five million Pfizer/BioNTech shots fell through in December "because someone doesn't want Taiwan to be too happy".

His comments raised concerns China might be trying to hinder Taiwan's inoculation drive.

Authoritarian Beijing regards democratic and self-ruled Taiwan as its own territory and tries to keep the island diplomatically isolated—including keeping it locked out of the World Health Organization.

In a statement on Thursday, BioNTech said discussions to supply Taiwan with doses were still ongoing.

"BioNTech is committed to help bringing an end to the pandemic for people across the world and we intend to supply Taiwan with our vaccine as part of this global commitment," it said.

The brief statement did not address Chen's comments or explain why the December deal did not materialise.

BioNTech has struck a deal with the Shanghai-based Fosun Pharmaceutical Group to bring the vaccine to China, including Taiwan.

Beijing has a long history of pressuring both Chinese and international companies when it wants to punish Taiwan.

It the first comments on the issue, China's foreign ministry on Thursday accused Taiwan of "carrying out political manipulation and hyping up political issues".

"We wish to provide necessary assistance Taiwanese compatriots in their

fight against the epidemic," spokeswoman Hua Chunying told reporters, without addressing whether China had played any role in the delayed December deal.

Foson has not responded to requests for comment.

Taiwan has survived the pandemic largely unscathed—with fewer than 940 confirmed cases and nine deaths so far—by closing its borders early, imposing strict quarantine measures and rolling out effective tracing.

But it has struggled to locate adequate vaccine supplies and only recently announced a supply of five million doses by American pharmaceutical giant Moderna and 200,000 doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine via COVAX.

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