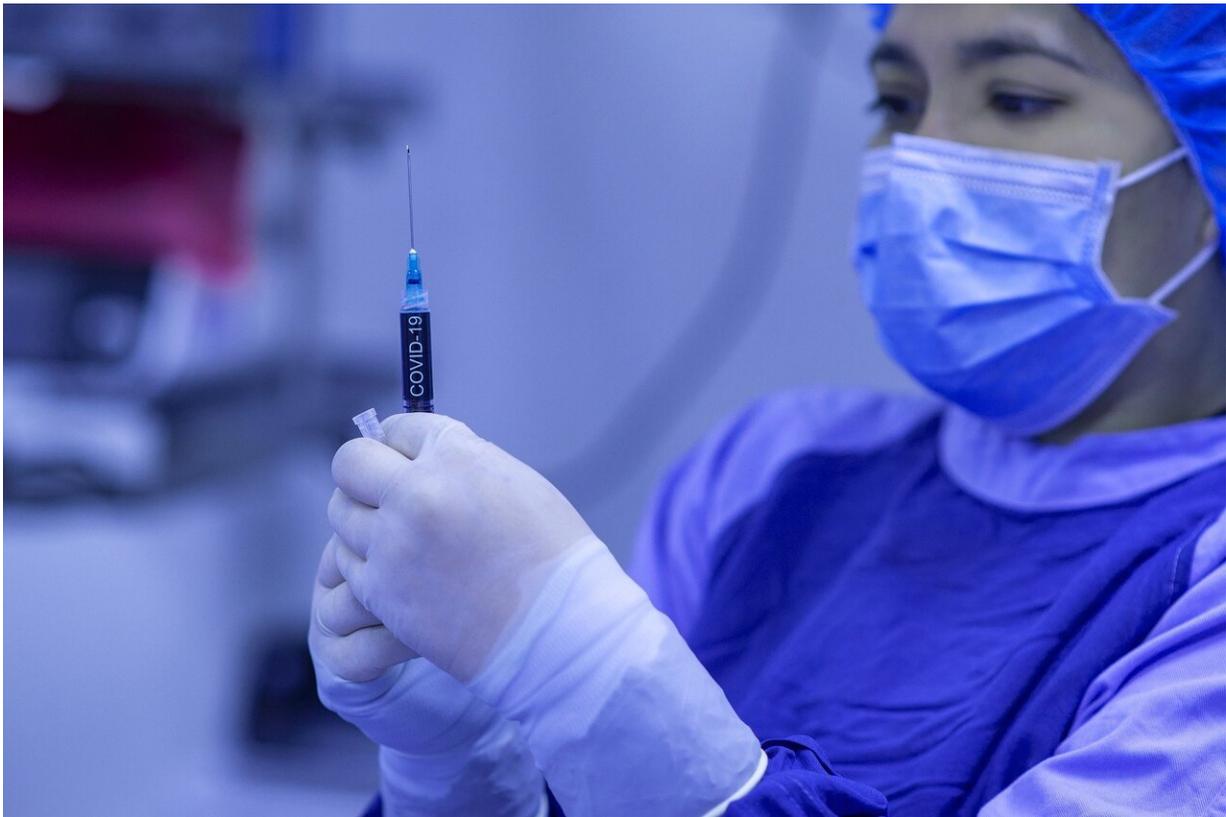


WHO waits on COVID vaccine makers to uphold pledges

February 18 2021



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The World Health Organization on Thursday urged COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers to make good on their commitments as the planet's poorest countries await their first doses.

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the Covax facility—the global COVID-19 [vaccine](#) procurement and distribution effort ensuring [poorer countries](#) can access doses—was now ready to begin.

Around 336 million AstraZeneca-Oxford doses and 1.2 million Pfizer-BioNTech doses—the only two vaccines with WHO approval—are set to start being shipped out later this month through Covax.

"At the beginning of the year I issued a call to action to ensure that vaccination of health workers was under way in all countries within the first 100 days of the year," Tedros told a news conference.

Friday "marks the half-way point, and we have made progress, but we are not there yet.

"With the emergency use listing of two versions of the AstraZeneca vaccine this week, Covax is ready to roll out vaccines and is waiting for several manufacturers to make good on their commitments," he said, without elaborating.

Concerns for small states

On Monday, the WHO gave the seal of approval to the AstraZeneca vaccine being manufactured in plants in India and South Korea, meaning it can now be shipped out via Covax.

The facility is set to issue its final distribution list for the first wave of deliveries next week. The first doses will be delivered by the end of February, with the bulk in March.

Around 145 economies are set to receive enough doses to immunise 3.3 percent of their collective population by mid-2021.

During his news conference, Tedros noted that countries in Europe—which have been striking their own deals with manufacturers—were aiming to vaccinate 70 percent of their populations in a similar same time frame.

Trinidad and Tobago's Prime Minister Keith Rowley, chairman of CARICOM, the 15-member Caribbean Community, voiced fears that small states, lacking bargaining power, would be shut out of the global vaccination drive.

'Invisible destroyer'

"As there is the understandable rush to receive the vaccines and inoculation of our various populations, we are more than a little bit concerned that there is, or is to be, hoarding and price-gouging as well as undue preference in some quarters," Rowley told the WHO press conference, via video-link.

"We are all yoked to an invisible destroyer. It is my hope and plea that... on this occasion, the rich take care of the poor.

"All we ask as members of the family of nations is that we not be forgotten, ignored—or worse, taken advantage of in this business of life and death."

The WHO launched its annual Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan for 2021 on Thursday, saying \$1.96 billion was needed to fund another year of battling the pandemic.

The plan's six objectives are to suppress transmission; reduce exposure; counter misinformation; protect the vulnerable; reduce death and illness; and accelerate equitable access to vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics.

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Citation: WHO waits on COVID vaccine makers to uphold pledges (2021, February 18) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-02-covid-vaccine-makers-pledges.html>

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