

WHO experts discuss AstraZeneca Covid vaccine

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The World Health Organization's vaccine experts were deciding Monday on their usage recommendations for the AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccine—including for older adults.

The 15-member Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) was spending the day in a virtual extraordinary meeting discussing the two-shot [vaccine](#).

The WHO said the recommendations on who it should and should not be used for would be made public later this week.

The regulatory authorities in several European nations have not authorised the vaccine for use among the over-65s—by far the most vulnerable age group for serious COVID-19 disease.

According to the SAGE meeting's agenda, "assessment of the critical evidence, including data and draft recommendations related to vaccine use in [older adults](#)" will form a key part of Monday's talks.

The meeting will also discuss recent evidence on new [coronavirus](#) variants of concern.

South Africa said Sunday it would suspend the start of its COVID-19 vaccinations with the AstraZeneca jab after a study showed the drug failed to prevent mild and moderate cases of the virus variant that has appeared in the country.

AstraZeneca to present findings

During Monday's SAGE meeting, AstraZeneca was due to make a 25-minute presentation about the safety and efficacy data on the jab, also known as AZD1222, plus results from the three phases of human testing, from the first jabs to mass trials.

The UK-Swedish pharmaceuticals giant was also to discuss risk management plans and other implementation considerations, before facing questions.

The meeting was also to get an outline of ongoing and planned studies.

The SAGE working group was then to present evidence including data and draft recommendations relating to the vaccine's use in older adults.

The four-and-a-half-hour meeting was due to wrap up with a presentation of the remaining draft recommendations.

In a separate process, the UN health agency is also set to decide on February 15 whether to give the vaccine emergency use listing for the versions produced in India and South Korea.

If granted, doses from those sites could start to be distributed to some of the world's [poorest countries](#) via Covax, the global vaccine procurement and distribution pool.

Many low-income countries are relying entirely on the AstraZeneca jab to start immunising their most vulnerable populations, but cannot receive their first doses until the WHO grants emergency authorisation.

SAGE advice

SAGE advises the WHO on overall global policies and strategies,

ranging from vaccines and technology, research and development, to delivery of immunisation and its links with other health interventions.

Chaired by Mexican doctor Alejandro Cravioto, the group is comprised of 15 experts from around the world representing a broad range of expertise.

SAGE has already issued advice on the usage of the Pfizer-BioNTech and the Moderna vaccines.

So far, the WHO has only given emergency use listing to the Pfizer jab, though several other manufacturers have started the evaluation process, including AstraZeneca and Moderna.

Covax is almost entirely dependent on the AstraZeneca jab in its first wave of distribution.

Some 145 countries are set to receive 337.2 million doses—enough to immunise 3.3 percent of their collective population by mid-2021. Of those, 336 million are AstraZeneca vials.

The first Covax deliveries are expected to take place in late February.

However, the AstraZeneca vaccines cannot start being shipped until the WHO signs them off.

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