

Russia's coronavirus vaccine approved for use in Mexico

February 3 2021, by Diego Delgado



Paramedics Carolina Estrada, left, disinfects her partner Elvin Munguia after mobilizing a COVID-19 patient from his home to a hospital in the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City, Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)

Mexico approved the Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V for use

Tuesday, just hours after the publication of early results of an advanced study saying it is about 91% effective.

Assistant Health Secretary Hugo López-Gatell, the government's pandemic spokesman, said the [health ministry](#) signed a contract Monday for 400,000 doses of Sputnik V that will arrive this month. That is still a tiny amount for Mexico's 126 million people.

It couldn't come a moment too soon. Mexico has been hit so hard that hospitals in the capital were 87% full, and ambulance drivers waited hours to find an open bed for patients. Mexico has reported about 159,500 test-confirmed deaths related to COVID-19, but excess-death estimates place the real toll at well over 195,000.

"Unfortunately, because of the saturation of the hospitals and the [phone lines](#), we are waiting about three or four hours before they can assign us a hospital, and to get there," said ambulance crew chief Eduardo Viguera.

Viguera noted patients are sometimes sent to the only available beds at hospitals, far away from the overwhelmed east side borough of Iztapalapa. He said some relatives get angry and aggressive with paramedics because of the delays in treatment.



Paramedics in hazmat suits move a COVID-19 patient inside a biocontainment unit from his home to a hospital in the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City, Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)

Because some patients are in such bad shape, some families make an even harder choice. Paramedics say they often go to pick up a seriously ill [coronavirus](#) patient only to find their loved ones want to cancel the emergency call, because they know treatment is in such short supply and they may never see their relative again.

"A lot of people prefer to keep their relative at home, knowing that they are going to die, but with their loved ones there for the last few minutes, hours, days," paramedic Paulina Cervantes said.

That desperation was on display Tuesday, when the Mexican government launched a new website for people over age 60 to register for appointments to get vaccines that the country doesn't yet have.

So many people logged on that the Health Department apparently didn't have the bandwidth to handle requests. The department's website was quickly overwhelmed and the registration page didn't load, returning a message: "Due to the overload of registrations, service has been interrupted. We are correcting and strengthening our infrastructure to avoid such interruptions."



Paramedic Eduardo Vigueras, head of the morning shift, right, disinfects his partner Oscar Reyes after moving a COVID-19 patient to a hospital in the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City, Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)

The Russian vaccine would become the third to receive emergency approval in Mexico. The regulating agency approved the Pfizer vaccine in December and AstraZeneca's in January. Mexico turned to the Russian vaccine following delays in obtaining others it was counting on.

A dozen countries have already approved the Russian vaccine for use, including Bolivia and Argentina, where López-Gatell visited in January to learn more about it. He acknowledged that there had been a "legitimate concern" among Mexicans, but that the early results published Tuesday in the [medical journal](#) *The Lancet* should alleviate them.

"The Russian Sputnik V vaccine is safe, it has 92% efficacy against COVID, it can be used safely and is effective in seniors," López-Gatell said. "It allows us now to accelerate the step of vaccination against COVID in Mexico."



A paramedic wearing hazmat gear prepares to pick up a COVID-18 patient, from the Troya ambulance base in the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City, Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)



Paramedics Carolina Estrada, left, is disinfected by her partner Elvin Munguia after mobilizing a COVID-19 patient from his home to a hospital in the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City, Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)



Paramedics in hazmat suits move a COVID-19 patient inside a biocontainment unit from his home to a hospital in the Iztapalapa district of Mexico City, Tuesday, Feb. 2 2021. (AP Photo/Marco Ugarte)



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Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador spoke with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin a week ago.

Mexico has so far given about 675,000 doses of vaccine, all of them from Pfizer. On Tuesday, a second batch of the active substance in the AstraZeneca [vaccine](#) arrived in Mexico, where it will be packed and distributed through the rest of Latin America.

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