

Uzbekistan certifies Russia's Sputnik vaccine for mass use

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Uzbekistan on Wednesday became the latest country to certify Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine for mass use, saying it planned to purchase one million doses for the country of 34 million.

Two-shot Sputnik V is leading the vaccine race in Central Asia, a five-country former Soviet region with close political and economic ties to Moscow.

Uzbekistan's state coronavirus commission said Sputnik V was "certified and approved for mass use in Uzbekistan" and the country was "taking practical measures" to secure an initial batch of one million doses.

The news comes after a pharmaceutical factory in neighbouring Kazakhstan said on Tuesday that it had gained approval from Kazakh authorities to produce and distribute Sputnik V. The factory expects to distribute 90,000 doses by the end of February.

In Uzbekistan, Sputnik V is likely to face competition from a vaccine developed by the Chinese pharmaceutical company Anhui Zhifei Longcom Biopharmaceutical.

The state coronavirus commission said Wednesday that the country was planning to begin production of the Chinese vaccine later this year, after launching phase three trials in the capital Tashkent in December.

Kazakhstan, Central Asia's second most populous country with around 19 million people, is the first country other than Russia to host production of Sputnik V.

A spokesman for the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) that financed Sputnik V's development said Monday that Brazil, India and South Korea are expected to follow.

Isolated Turkmenistan, which claims to have no cases of the [coronavirus](#), was the first Central Asian country to register the Sputnik V vaccine, but has provided no information about its vaccination campaign.

Kyrgyzstan, one of the region's [poorest countries](#), is in negotiations with Russia to secure up to half a million doses of Sputnik V for free, health minister Alymkadyr Beishanaliyev said on Monday.

Russia registered Sputnik V—named after the Soviet-era satellite—in August, months ahead of Western competitors but before the start of large-scale clinical trials, which left some experts wary.

But top medical journal *The Lancet* published a new analysis of the [vaccine](#) this month declaring it 91.6 percent effective.

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