

EU countries to resume AstraZeneca jabs after 'safe' verdict

March 18 2021



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

Leading EU countries said Thursday they would resume AstraZeneca vaccinations after the European medical regulator said the jab is "safe and effective" and not associated with a higher blood clot risk after days

of commotion around the shot.

The closely-watched announcement from the European Medicines Agency (EMA) came after the WHO and Britain's health watchdog both said the vaccine was safe, adding that it was far riskier to not get the shot as several countries face a worrying rise in coronavirus cases.

After the EMA's announcement a raft of European countries said they would soon resume vaccinations, including Germany, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia and Bulgaria.

France on Thursday became the latest nation to toughen COVID restrictions, announcing a month-long limited lockdown for Paris and several other regions to try and stave off a third wave of infections that has overwhelmed hospitals.

The EMA's chief Emer Cooke said Thursday that after an investigation into the AstraZeneca jab, its "committee has come to a clear scientific conclusion: this is a safe and effective vaccine".

"The committee also concluded that the vaccine is not associated with an increase in the overall risk of thromboembolic events or blood clots," she added.

However, the agency said it "cannot rule out definitively" a link to a rare clotting disorder.

The UK health regulator also said there were no links between blood clots and the Pfizer vaccine.

The World Health Organization (WHO) repeated that it was better to take the AstraZeneca vaccine than not.

AstraZeneca's chief medical officer Ann Taylor said that "vaccine safety is paramount and we welcome the regulators' decisions which affirm the overwhelming benefit of our vaccine in stopping the pandemic".

However Norway and Sweden said they were not ready to resume using the vaccine.

The Norwegian Institute of Public Health said it "took note" of the EMA's ruling, but it was "premature" to draw conclusions and it would announce its own opinion by the end of next week.

Paris lockdown

The furore around the jab has marred the global vaccine drive aimed at ending a pandemic that has killed more than 2.6 million people, and comes as several countries report jumps in new cases.

After recording its highest daily caseload in nearly four months on Wednesday, France said it would impose a limited lockdown in the Paris region from Friday at midnight.

The measures fall short of a full-blown lockdown, but will see non-essential shops closed and outdoor movement restricted in the affected regions, while schools are to stay open.

French Prime Minister Jean Castex announced the new measures as well as saying he would get the AstraZeneca vaccine "to show that we can have complete confidence in it".

Bulgaria and Ukraine also readied for tougher restrictions to stem rising cases, while the WHO issued a grim update on ballooning infections in Central Europe and the Balkans.

'Italy's Wuhan'

So far, more than 400 million coronavirus vaccine doses have been administered globally, mostly in wealthier nations that have secured contracts with drug makers.

AstraZeneca's shot, among the cheapest available and easier to store and transport than some of its rivals, has been billed as the vaccine of choice for poorer nations.

It is currently a vital part of Covax, which was set up to procure COVID-19 vaccines and ensure their equitable distribution around the world.

But countries ranging from France to Venezuela and Indonesia paused the rollout of the AstraZeneca jab after a small number of reports emerged of blood clots among people who had received the vaccine.

France's Europe Minister Clement Beaune defended the decision taken by countries to suspend use of the vaccine and refer it to the EMA for safety checks, telling AFP it was "necessary in order to coordinate and remove the doubts".

In Britain, which did not halt the jab, officials insisted that an expected vaccine shortfall at the end of the month would not scupper plans to ease its virus restrictions in the coming months as the government has promised.

US President Joe Biden meanwhile said his goal of getting 100 million vaccine doses administered in his first 100 days in office will be met on Friday—far in advance of the original target.

The US, which has yet to approve the AstraZeneca vaccine, also said it

would send millions of doses to its neighbours Mexico and Canada, which have approved the jab.

Italy, the first European country to become engulfed by the pandemic, held a national day of mourning Thursday, with a ceremony in Bergamo, the northern city that became known as "Italy's Wuhan"—the Chinese city where the first COVID-19 cases were identified.

Italy chose March 18 for the memorial to coincide with the day in 2020 when the army had to step in to carry away scores of coffins from Bergamo's overwhelmed crematorium.

Images of coffin-laden camouflaged trucks crossing the city at night quickly became one of the symbols of the pandemic and still haunt the country today.

"We cannot hug each other, but this is the day in which we must all feel even closer," Prime Minister Mario Draghi said.

© 2021 AFP

Citation: EU countries to resume AstraZeneca jabs after 'safe' verdict (2021, March 18) retrieved 6 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-countries-resume-astrazeneca-jabs-eu.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--