

First COVAX vaccines arrive in Cambodia from India

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Cambodia on Tuesday received its first batch of 324,000 coronavirus vaccine doses from India that are part of the World Health Organization's COVAX initiative, as the country expands its

immunization program with the goal of inoculating a majority of its population this year.

Health Minister Mam Bunheng was at the airport to receive the shipment of the Oxford-AstraZeneca Covishield [vaccine](#). Prime Minister Hun Sen will be given the first dose on Thursday.

Cambodia, which has yet to report any virus deaths, received its first shipment of 600,000 doses of a Chinese-produced vaccine on Feb. 7, part of 1 million doses Beijing is donating. The country began its vaccination program on Feb. 10, starting with Hun Sen's sons, government ministers and officials.

The Chinese Embassy in Phnom Penh said Monday that the remaining 400,000 doses produced by the Beijing Institute of Biological Products Co. would arrive sometime in April.

Hun Sen will receive the Indian-manufactured vaccine because he is 68. In China, the Sinopharm vaccine was approved only for people 18-59 years old because that was the population studied in clinical trials. While there is not yet data on its effectiveness for other age groups, other countries at their discretion may use it for older people.

China is Cambodia's biggest investor and its closest political partner, while Hun Sen is shunned by some Western nations who consider his government to be repressive. Cambodia, in turn, backs Beijing's geopolitical positions in international forums on issues such as China's territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Cambodia has recorded 844 cases of the [coronavirus](#), with no deaths. It reported 24 new cases on Tuesday as it tries to deal with a new surge.

The surge was traced back to a foreign resident who broke hotel

quarantine on Feb. 4 and went to a nightclub. That caused a slew of infections and led the government on Feb. 20 to announce a two-week closure of all public schools, cinemas, bars and entertainment areas in Phnom Penh.

Hun Sen said earlier this month that Cambodia is seeking to reserve 20 million [vaccine doses](#) to inoculate 10 million people, roughly two-thirds of its population.

In addition to China's donation, Australia has announced a grant of \$28 million to purchase 3 million doses, and Cambodia is set to get 7 million doses through the World Health Organization's COVAX initiative.

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