

Doctors urge Spain to use AstraZeneca vaccine more widely

March 10 2021, by Joseph Wilson



A resident awaits the visit of her family behind glass meant to protect against COVID-19 at DomusVi nursing home in Leganes, Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. Spain is preparing to tighten some pandemic restrictions on movement during the approaching Easter holiday, which is a traditional period for family visits. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

Chafing under Spain's sluggish vaccination rollout, regional health authorities and doctors are urging the central government in Madrid to widen the categories of people who can receive the AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine.

While other European countries [like Germany](#), France and Italy have expanded the use of vaccine made by the British-Swedish company to include more [elderly patients](#), Spain has stuck with administering it to those 55 and under.

But critics say Spain's reluctance to use AstraZeneca, combined with shipment delays of all three vaccines authorized for use in the EU, is threatening to leave [vulnerable people](#) exposed. The EU so far has approved vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna and AstraZeneca, which all require two shots per person, and its regulator, the European Medicines Agency, is considering whether to approve the one-shot Johnson & Johnson vaccine on Thursday.

The Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are currently going to those over 80 years old in Spain, while essential workers 55 and under like teachers and police officers are getting AstraZeneca jabs.

"That has greatly compromised our vaccination strategy, " regional health authorities in Catalonia said Wednesday. "There are, for example, teachers and [police officers](#) over 55 years old who still don't have a chance to get a vaccine, while their younger colleagues already do."



A health worker shows the media AstraZeneca vaccine vials at a vaccination center set up in front of Rome's Termini central station, Monday, March 8, 2021. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino), Monday, March 8, 2021. (AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino)

When the first [coronavirus](#) vaccines arrived in January, Spain's government pledged to have vaccinated 70% of its adult population by the summer. So far, only 1.4 million of Spain's 47 million residents have been inoculated.

Catalonia and other regions, including Madrid, say a lack of doses is slowing down their efforts. Spain has administered fewer than 700,000 of the 1.1 million AstraZeneca vaccines it has received.

An independent society of doctors is also recommending that Spain become bolder in its approach to battling the world's worst health crisis in a century.

"The pace of vaccination in Spain and other countries is very slow, fundamentally due to the shortage of vaccines arriving, but possibly also due to self-imposed stumbling blocks caused by an excess of prudence," Spain's Organization of Medical Societies said.



Residents wait the visit of their families through a glass for protecting against COVID-19 at DomusVi nursing home in Leganes, Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. Spain is preparing to tighten some pandemic restrictions on movement during the approaching Easter holiday, which is a traditional period for family visits. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



A resident wearing a face mask to protect against the stands at DomusVi nursing home in Leganes, Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



Emiliano Diaz, 81, leaves a sports center after receiving a Pfizer vaccine during a mass COVID-19 vaccination campaign in the small town of Santo Domingo de La Calzada, northern Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. Regional governments have called for all residents over the age of 80 to be vaccinated. (AP Photo/Alvaro Barrientos)



A resident makes exercise at DomusVi nursing home in Leganes, Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. Spain is preparing to tighten some pandemic restrictions on movement during the approaching Easter holiday, which is a traditional period for family visits. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



A resident rests at DomusVi nursing home in Leganes, Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



Residents meet with their families through a glass to protect themselves against COVID-19 at DomusVi nursing home in Leganes, Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. Spain is preparing to tighten some pandemic restrictions on movement during the approaching Easter holiday, which is a traditional period for family visits. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



Residents wearing face masks to protect against the spread of coronavirus make exercise at DomusVi nursing home in Leganes, Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



Residents meet with their families through a glass to protect themselves against COVID-19 at DomusVi nursing home in Leganes, Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. Spain is preparing to tighten some pandemic restrictions on movement during the approaching Easter holiday, which is a traditional period for family visits. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)



A resident wearing a face mask to protect against the spread of coronavirus looks on though a window at DomusVi nursing home in Leganes, Spain, Wednesday, March 10, 2021. (AP Photo/Manu Fernandez)

Spain is trying to ramp up its vaccination efforts by holding campaigns for large groups like the one organized Wednesday for 1,800 people over 80 in the northern town of Santo Domingo de La Calzada.

Pilar Ramirez, a 52-year-old caretaker accompanying her 93-year-old charge, said she was happy for the older people who are most at risk but said she had few hopes that her wait for a shot would end soon.

"At my age, it looks like many months will pass before they give me my [vaccine](#)," she said.

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