

EU agency approves AstraZeneca plant caught in UK row

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The EU's drug watchdog gave the green light Friday to the Dutch Halix factory to produce AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine, which has been at the heart of a bitter dispute with Britain.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) also granted approval to a

Pfizer/BioNTech plant in Marburg, Germany and a manufacturing site for the Moderna [vaccine](#) in Switzerland.

Brussels has threatened to block exports to the UK from the Halix plant in Leiden in the Netherlands until drugs giant AstraZeneca makes good on its promised vaccine deliveries to the bloc.

"A new manufacturing site has been approved for the production of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine active substance," the Amsterdam-based EMA said in a statement.

"The Halix site is located in Leiden, the Netherlands, and will bring the total number of manufacturing sites licensed for the production of the active substance of the vaccine to four."

The EMA said the "important" new factory approvals "will increase manufacturing capacity and supply of COVID-19 vaccines in the EU."

EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides told AFP that the new vaccines would be delivered from the AstraZeneca plant within days following the EMA decision.

She said it had been made under an "accelerated" process.

"We now expect that vaccines produced by this plant will be delivered to EU member states in the coming days as part of the contractual obligation and commitment made by AstraZeneca to European citizens," she said in a statement sent to AFP.

Some EU countries had been "severely affected by the disappointing reduction in deliveries of AstraZeneca vaccines," Kyriakides said.

"Had it not been for the under deliveries from AstraZeneca, EU

vaccination rates could have been almost twice as high," she said.

The Dutch plant has been at the centre of a furious row, with Prime Minister Boris Johnson's government claiming it as part of the British vaccine supply chain.

However EU chief Ursula von der Leyen warned Thursday that it will ban firms including AstraZeneca from exporting vaccines to other countries until they meet their commitments to the bloc.

While the EU has talked tough, the Netherlands and Belgium, centres of EU vaccine production, are skittish at talk of an embargo, fearful that disruption to global supply chains could hurt other firms' production.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte said on Thursday that London and Brussels could agree a deal on vaccine sharing by the weekend "or soon after" to avoid the imposition of an EU embargo.

But he added that he had warned Johnson that the Netherlands would enforce any EU decision to halt Halix exports.

"I explained to him that this is not how this works in Europe and that this is not a bilateral decision between us and the UK," Rutte said.

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