

EU health agency to rule on troubled AstraZeneca jab

March 18 2021, by Danny Kemp With Afp Bureaus



The furore around the AstraZeneca jab has marred the global vaccine drive and comes as several countries report spikes in new cases

Europe's medical regulator is set to give its verdict on the safety of the AstraZeneca vaccine on Thursday, following a chaotic few weeks that

has seen nations suspend its use over blood clot fears.

There are "a number of options" open to scientists at the European Medicines Agency, its chief said earlier this week, including suspending approval for the jab in the EU, with the bloc's inoculation programme already scrambling for vaccines.

Despite more than a dozen countries pausing rollouts, the EMA says it has found "no indication" of a serious problem and that the number of post-jab blood clots is no higher than it is among the general, unvaccinated population.

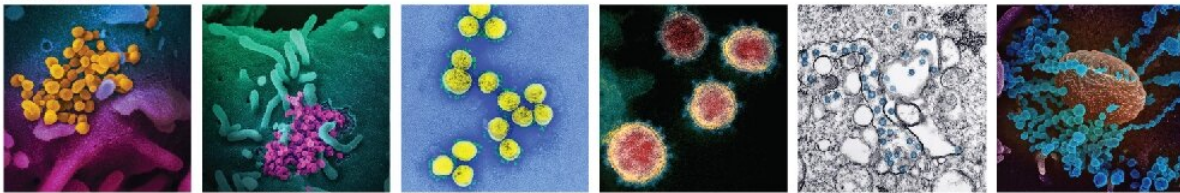
The World Health Organization said Wednesday it was better to take the AstraZeneca vaccine than not—adding that it was looking into available data on the shot.

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.

France recorded its highest daily caseload in nearly four months Wednesday, with authorities set to announce measures affecting 18 million people, including a possible weekend lockdown for the hard-hit Paris region.

Origins of Covid-19: unanswered questions

What we still don't know about the beginning of the pandemic that has killed more than 2.6 million people worldwide



Lab images: NIH/CDC/NIAD

To what extent was the virus circulating in Wuhan, China before the first known case in December 2019?	To what extent was it found outside of China before Dec 2019?	What was the real role of the Huanan market in Wuhan? Origin or amplifier?	What was the intermediate species that passed the virus onto humans?	Did frozen meat play any role in early infections?	Has the theory of the accidental lab-leak been conclusively disproven?
It seems likely it was circulating, but China researchers have not been able to detect antibodies in blood bank samples taken before that date	European researchers found antibodies in samples at blood banks from Nov 2019 onwards Are these explained by travel from China?	Viral material was found in drains and sewage but not on an animal carcass	While bats are generally accepted as the reservoir species, researchers believe the virus passed through another animal before infecting humans	The WHO team already concluded that the virus most likely jumped from live animals, but the suggestion that frozen meat may have played a role has not been disproven	WHO experts have said that the theory of an accidental infection from the Wuhan Institute of Virology is highly unlikely Yet the evidence to completely rule this out has not yet been published



Sources: nature.com - Where did covid come from? Five mysteries the remain/ publichealthmatters.blog.gov.uk - John Watson, Uncovering the origins of Covid-19

Graphic on key questions about the origins of the global pandemic that has killed more than 2.6 million people and devastated economies around the world.

Caseloads are also spiking in Iraq and India, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi called for "quick and decisive steps" to halt a new wave of infections in the world's second most populous country.

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.

India said Wednesday it would continue to roll out the AstraZeneca jabs—produced by its Serum Institute—in its huge immunisation programme "with full vigour."

Sinovac goes south

Chile said it had immunised 49 scientists and members of its armed forces working at a [research station](#) in the icy wastes of Antarctica, the first inoculations on the southernmost continent.



Antarctica was one of the last places on Earth to be affected by the virus, but on December 21, an outbreak was reported at a Chilean army base, with 36 people infected

People stationed at two other Chilean bases in Antarctica had also been due to receive their first doses of China's Sinovac jab, but those were delayed by adverse weather conditions, Victor Videla, the doctor in charge of the inoculation programme, told AFP.

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On the other side of the South Pacific, New Zealand said Thursday its economy contracted at a record rate in 2020, with the government blaming a hard lockdown last year that was instrumental in helping contain the virus.

GDP shrank 2.9 percent the statistics agency said, although Finance Minister Grant Robertson pointed out New Zealand's economy had outperformed those of Australia, Britain, the United States and Japan.

In Ireland, St Patrick's day celebrations were dampened for a second year running with the country still facing restrictions—after the first wave of anti-virus measures shut the party down last year.



French authorities are set to announce measures affecting 18 million people, including a possible weekend lockdown for the hard-hit Paris region

"It's a year on now and... we seem to be back where we started," said publican Tom Cleary, perched on a barstool in Dublin next to a Guinness tap fashioned in the shape of the Celtic harp.

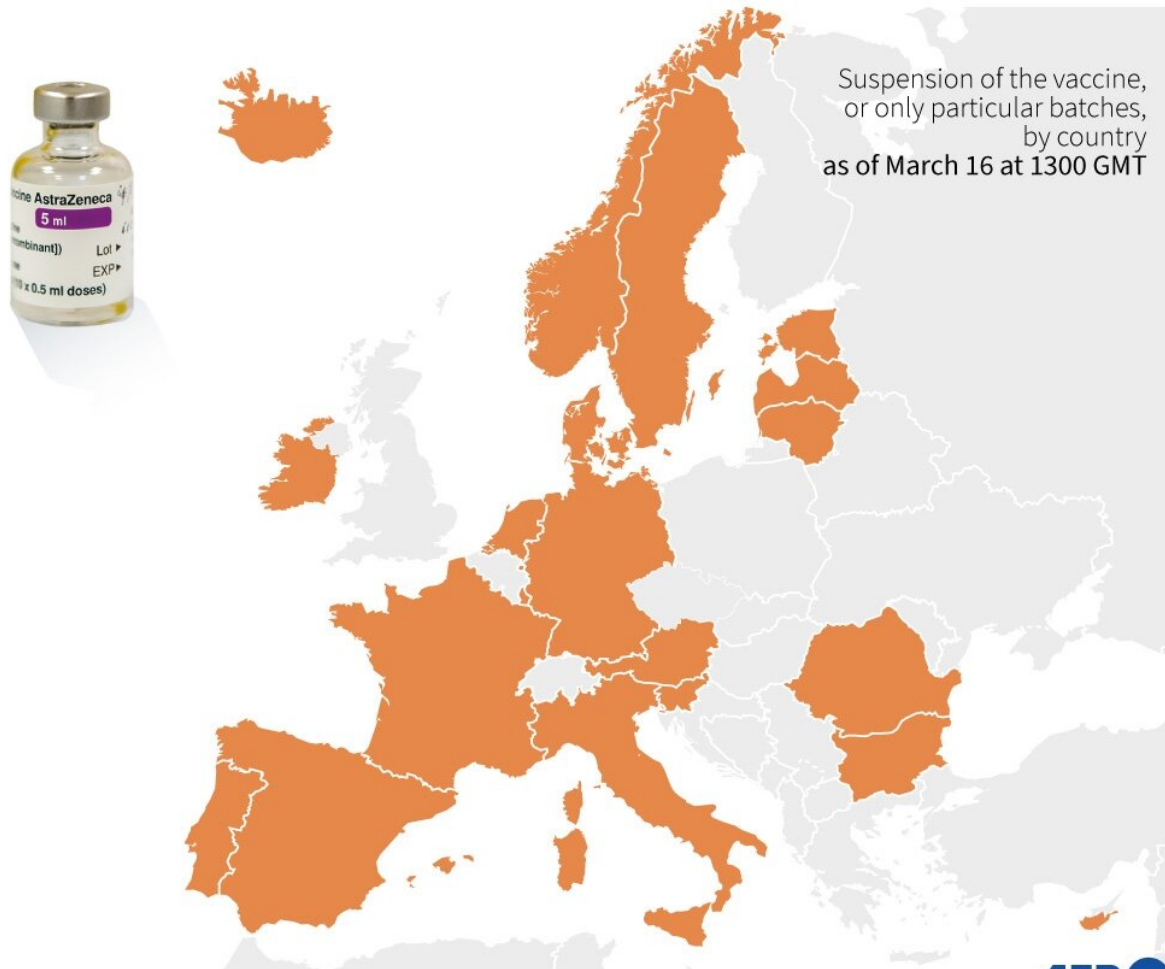
"It's sad there's no end in sight," he told AFP. "I mean, will we be here next St Patrick's Day with the same problems?"

'Made me more humane'

Being vaccinated has allowed Colombian doctor Norberto Medina to

return to his job at an intensive care unit in the capital Bogota feeling "more relaxed".

Suspension of AstraZeneca vaccine in Europe



Source: authorities

French authorities are set to announce measures affecting 18 million people, including a possible weekend lockdown for the hard-hit Paris region

Medina, 41, has lived all facets of the pandemic, seeing patients die on his ward, nursing others back to health—and eventually staring death in the face when he contracted the virus himself.

"The pandemic has changed me forever," he told AFP after he returned to work, 54 days after he was diagnosed.

"It has made me more humane."

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