

# EU tightens rules on coronavirus vaccine exports

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The EU on Wednesday tightened its rules on Covid-19 vaccine exports, making authorisations contingent on destination countries behaving fairly in return—particularly vaccine-producing ones.

Officials said this means the European Commission will weigh how needy those countries are, in terms of infection rates and how many vaccines they have, as well as how readily they send vaccines or vaccine ingredients to the EU.

"Open roads should run in both directions," commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said.

"This is why the European Commission will introduce the principles of reciprocity and proportionality into the EU's existing authorisation mechanism," she said, referring to a rule introduced in February.

"We have to ensure timely and sufficient vaccine deliveries to EU citizens. Every day counts," she said, noting that Europe was facing a third wave of infections.

EU officials were adamant the scheme is not a "vaccine export ban" and does not target any country in particular—though they called out UK-based company AstraZeneca for falling far short on its deliveries to Europe.

AstraZeneca is "not even close" to delivering 30 million doses promised in the first three months of this year—which were already well below the 120 million they had been under contract to supply—commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis told a news conference.

The commission early this month backed Italy in using the mechanism to ban a shipment of 250,000 AstraZeneca doses meant for Australia. It was the only time so far a ban has been applied, with 380 other export requests being approved—including ones sending 11 million doses to Britain.

## **Britain sees threat**

Britain, however, sees the reinforced export authorisation scheme as a threat to its [vaccination programme](#), which had been powering ahead thanks to smooth AstraZeneca deliveries.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has been speaking to EU leaders and the commission in past days to try to head off any bans on shipments from the EU of doses of AstraZeneca or BioNTech/Pfizer vaccines.

A UK government spokesman stressed that "vaccines are an international operation" and said "we will continue to work with our European partners to deliver the vaccine rollout".

The official added that "we remain confident in our supplies and are on track" with the national vaccine rollout.

Under the revised mechanism, a company running a vaccine plant in an EU country is required to apply for export authorisation. The EU country and the commission decide jointly whether or not to grant approval.

Any blocked doses are not seized by the EU, and "it's of course for a company itself to comment what its intentions are" regarding that shipment, Dombrovskis said.

The added scrutiny, however, puts deliberate pressure on companies to factor in Europe's needs compared to the destination country before applying for export approval.

"Some countries have secured already a lot of vaccines, they have already secured a vaccination rate which is much, much higher than in the European Union," one EU official noted.

## 'Fair share'

The EU—a [vaccine](#)-producing powerhouse—stands out for continuing to allow exports while other countries with big production bases, such as Britain and the United States, use legislation or commercial contracts to keep doses for their populations only, officials said.

The EU was seeking to strike a balance between that "openness" and the imperative to also vaccinate much of its 450-million population.

"If you have a vaccination rate (in a non-EU country) which is already close to 100 percent, why would you need then vaccines to go in there while in other areas in the European Union, for example, there is a lack?" the EU official asked.

The reinforced [export](#) evaluation mechanism "helps us in the overall assessment and to make sure that Europe gets its fair share," he said.

EU officials indicated they did not see any immediate problem in terms of reciprocity with non-EU countries such as the US and Switzerland.

They also said they were confident EU leaders would support the stepped-up measures when they held a virtual summit on Thursday, and that the mechanism was compliant with World Trade Organization rules.

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