

Palestinians roll out vaccines as virus cases spike

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Thousands of Palestinian health workers, the elderly, and patients with cancer or kidney disease were set to get COVID-19 vaccines from Sunday as the health ministry ramped up its inoculation campaign.

The rollout came days after some 60,000 doses of Pfizer/BioNTech and AstraZeneca doses arrived in the Israeli-occupied West Bank via the Covax scheme of the World Health Organisation.

Cases of COVID-19 have spiked in the enclave in recent weeks, sparking a flood of patients hospital officials say they are struggling to treat.

Palestinians in the West Bank and the Israeli-blockaded Gaza Strip have had limited access to vaccines compared to Israelis, roughly half of whom have received the recommended two shots of the Pfizer/BioNTech jab.

Israel has resisted calls from [rights groups](#) and the United Nations to inoculate all Palestinians, saying the Ramallah-based Palestinian Authority is responsible for obtaining vaccines.

The Israeli army says it has vaccinated some 100,000 Palestinian workers who have permits to enter Israel and West Bank Jewish settlements.

About 60,000 doses of the Russian Sputnik V vaccine have reached Gaza from the United Arab Emirates.

Those deliveries were orchestrated by prominent Palestinian political figure Mohammed Dahlan, a rival of president Mahmud Abbas exiled in Abu Dhabi.

The Palestinian Authority is waiting for another 100,000 doses from China.

Abbas on Saturday published a photograph of himself getting vaccinated. It was not clear when the picture was taken.

The Palestinian [health ministry](#) said in early March that top Palestine Liberation Organisation officials over the age of 65 had been given shots. Abbas is 85.

As of Sunday, 2,416 people had died of COVID-19 in the West Bank and Hamas Islamist-controlled Gaza Strip.

Another 221,500 were reported infected cross the two Palestinian territories.

In Israel, more than 6,000 people have died of COVID-19, but the infection rate has plummeted and only about 18,300 people were sick with COVID-19 Sunday, the Israeli Ministry of Health reported.

The Palestinian vaccine campaign comes ahead of the first Palestinian election in 15 years. Legislative elections are scheduled for May 22 and a presidential vote for the end of July.

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