

UK jabs top 20 mn as Europe lags behind, Czechs turn to Sputnik V

March 1 2021



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Britain said Sunday that more than 20 million of its people have received at least one dose of a coronavirus vaccine, while the rest of Europe lagged behind, with the hard-hit Czech Republic turning to Russia's

Sputnik V jab as it fights the world's highest infection rate.

UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson called the landmark "a huge national achievement" and praised National Health Service staff and others for their "tireless work".

London says it plans to offer a first jab to the whole adult population by the end of July. Only Israel and the United Arab Emirates have vaccinated more people per capita.

But Israel, despite having administered both doses of the Pfizer [vaccine](#) to more than a third of its population, is still in its third lockdown, with restrictions easing gradually.

On Sunday, dozens of ultra-Orthodox Jews defied the lockdown to mark the Purim holiday. Some threw stones at police in Jerusalem as tensions persist between authorities and a deeply devout community accused of repeatedly flouting [coronavirus](#) restrictions.

'Vaccines have no ideology'

Czech President Milos Zeman meanwhile said he had written to his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to request a supply of Sputnik V doses after a slower than expected vaccination rollout, and expects a supply to arrive "in the next few days".

Zeman said he would also welcome China's Sinopharm vaccine in the country that has recorded over 1.2 million confirmed COVID-19 cases and more than 20,000 deaths, arguing that "vaccines have no ideology".

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said Sunday he received the Sinopharm jab days after Hungary became the first EU member to use the vaccine, which has not been approved by EU regulators.

On Saturday, the United States authorised Johnson & Johnson's vaccine for emergency use, offering a glimmer of hope though President Joe Biden said the nation's battle was far from over.

Americans "cannot let our guard down now or assume that victory is inevitable," Biden said in a statement.

The United States is the worst-affected country with 511,998 deaths at last count, followed by Brazil, Mexico and India.

The single-shot J&J vaccine is highly effective in preventing severe COVID-19, including against newer variants, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) said before giving it the green light.

The White House's top pandemic advisor Anthony Fauci said Sunday that [older children](#) could begin receiving jabs by the fall and younger ones by year-end or early 2022.

School reopenings, intensely debated, have varied sharply across the country.

The J&J vaccine is likely to be approved for use in the European Union in early March, French Industry Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher said Sunday.

She said the bloc hoped to receive 600 million doses of the vaccine by the end of June.

Border controls

With the pandemic now having killed more than 2.5 million people worldwide, Europeans continue to live under some of the world's strictest restrictions—and in France they just got tougher.

Two cities, northern Dunkirk and southern Nice, locked down over the weekends to halt the spread.

"We have to do something as COVID is getting worse in the region," Charlie Kentish, a British resident taking an early morning walk in Nice, told AFP. He was resigned to spending his weekends playing video games with his teenage children.

Germany declared France's COVID-battered Moselle region a high-risk area for virus variants, prompting tougher entry rules for visitors.

Travellers will need to show a fresh negative coronavirus test from Tuesday.

Even in relatively unscathed New Zealand, the biggest city Auckland was thrust back into lockdown on Saturday shortly after a three-day shutdown ended.

The final of the America's Cup sailing competition between Team New Zealand and Italy's Luna Rossa has been pushed back to at least March 10.

A small cluster has been linked to a school, but New Zealand's caseload still pales in comparison with the numbers seen in Europe and the Americas.

Brazil is once again in the grip of a surge in cases, with cities and states imposing a new round of restrictions.

And while Western nations have doled out tens of millions of vaccine doses, many poorer countries are only just getting their first deliveries.

In Argentina, a scandal drew thousands of people into the streets over

"VIP vaccinations" in which friends of the health minister jumped the queue for jabs. The minister, Gines Gonzalez Garcia, quit last week.

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Citation: UK jabs top 20 mn as Europe lags behind, Czechs turn to Sputnik V (2021, March 1)
retrieved 25 April 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-uk-jabs-mn-europe-lags.html>

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