

# UK 'reassured' EU will not block COVID vaccines

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British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Monday he was "reassured" EU leaders do not want blockades on vaccine exports, while Ireland's leader warned a threatened ban would be "very retrograde".

Britain has urged the European Union not to halt exports of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine in response to a shortfall in deliveries to the bloc from the Anglo-Swedish firm.

"I'm reassured by talking to EU partners over the last few months that they don't want to see blockades, I think that's very, very important," Johnson told reporters.

"I've talked to our friends repeatedly. We're all facing the same pandemic, we all have the same problems," he added.

"Developing vaccines, rolling them out, these are international projects and they require international cooperation."

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on Saturday again threatened to impose an export ban on the AstraZeneca vaccine unless the company delivers more of the 90 million doses it agreed to supply in the first quarter of 2021.

Irish prime minister Micheal Martin urged Brussels not to carry out its threat.

"I'm very much against it, I think it would be a very retrograde step," he told local broadcaster RTE.

"It's absolutely vital that we keep supply chains open. (If) you start putting up barriers, other countries may follow suit in terms of some of those vital raw materials that are required.

"If we start that we are in trouble," he added, saying he had told EU leaders of his concerns last week.

**'No illusions'**

The cross-Channel row is increasingly focused on a factory in the Netherlands set to produce future supplies of the AstraZeneca jab but still awaiting official approval, according to EU and UK sources.

Both Brussels and London are laying claim to the doses, they say.

EU commission spokesman Eric Mamer said Monday that the bloc was in discussions with British authorities, "and as ever the European Commission is open and constructive in trying to find solutions".

While Europe's vaccine drive has lagged—and some parts of the continent are now seeing a fresh surge in infections—Britain has vaccinated more than half of its adult population with at least one dose.

It plans to have gradually eased all lockdown restrictions by June 21 as a result.

Despite the export row and supply issues already forecast for next month, Johnson said his government would "just bash on with the roadmap that we've set out".

However, he warned the wave of new cases currently affecting continental Europe would likely hit Britain as well.

"People in this country should be under no illusions that [previous experience](#) has taught us that when a wave hits our friends it, I'm afraid, washes up on our shores as well," he said.

Britain has been one of the hardest hit countries in the pandemic, with more than 126,000 deaths.

But infections, hospitalisations and deaths have plummeted in recent weeks as the vaccination roll out takes effect.

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