

World's first Covax jab injected as US eyes J&J rollout

March 1 2021



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Ghana's President Nana Akufo-Addo on Monday became the first recipient of a coronavirus vaccine under the global Covax scheme, as US health workers prepared to distribute nearly four million doses of the

single-shot Johnson & Johnson jab.

Covax, a scheme designed to ensure poorer countries do not miss out on vaccinations as worries grow that rich nations are hogging the doses, is aiming to deliver at least two billion jabs by the end of the year.

Akufo-Addo received his AstraZeneca shot live on television along with his wife, while in neighbouring Ivory Coast a presidential spokesman got the country's first jab, also part of a Covax delivery.

Ivory Coast received some 504,000 jabs from Covax, while Ghana got 600,000 that it will start to roll out this week.

"It is important that I set the example that this vaccine is safe by being the first to have it, so that everybody in Ghana can feel comfortable about taking this vaccine," the president said.

India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi also got his coronavirus jab on Monday—although a glitch in the online booking system meant thousands of others were turned away from hospitals nationwide.

And in the United States, 3.9 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine are due to be delivered after it became the third jab approved by US regulators.

The J&J rollout comes as a boost to President Joe Biden's plan to beat back a virus that has killed more than half a million Americans, making the US the world's worst-hit nation.

Legal wrangle

Vaccines are seen as crucial to returning the world to normality and healing the economy after a pandemic that has claimed more than 2.5

million lives across the globe.

Over 224 million doses have been administered worldwide, according to national data compiled by AFP, with the Philippines among the latest countries to launch a rollout on Monday.

But rich countries have bought up the vast majority of those available, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) to warn that the crisis cannot end unless poor countries can vaccinate their populations too.

A new row is brewing over a call led by India and South Africa for intellectual property rights to the vaccines to be waived.

Backed by dozens of governments from Argentina to Bangladesh, they argue that this would boost production and ultimately bring the pandemic to a swifter end.

But the United States, the European Union and Switzerland—home to major pharmaceutical firms—oppose the idea, which is being thrashed out at a World Trade Organization meeting on Monday and Tuesday.

Globes glitches

Meanwhile, the seesaw nature of virus restrictions continued.

Finland announced a state of emergency and moved towards tighter rules, while Germany began to lifting curbs Monday with the opening of salons.

"It's such a relief," Hans-Joachim Berthold, a 64-year-old Berliner, told AFP after rushing to his newly opened hairdressers. "I couldn't bear to look at myself in the mirror before!"

But while inoculation campaigns are now well under way, the spread of highly infectious COVID variants has fuelled worries that they could prove more resistant to the vaccines.

Britain has appealed for a person infected with the potent Brazilian strain to come forward after they failed to leave contact details while being tested—meaning they could still be infecting others without knowing it.

In some countries, widespread vaccine scepticism remains another obstacle to achieving mass immunity, although a survey of six countries suggests willingness to get the jab is on the rise.

Even in France, the country with the least enthusiasm of those surveyed, willingness is up to 59 percent, the study by KekstCNC found.

And while vaccine scepticism is relatively low in Russia, a separate poll suggested a deeper COVID-scepticism: two-thirds of respondents believe the disease itself is a manmade biological weapon.

In the entertainment world, mass vaccinations are fuelling hopes of an eventual return to live events with big crowds.

But the usually-glitzy Golden Globes on Sunday night illustrated how normality is still a long way off, with awards dished out to film and television stars against a backdrop of awkward technical glitches.

Initial reviews were biting, Variety calling it a "lazy, clueless ceremony" and Deadline dubbing it "bloated and glitchy".

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Citation: World's first Covax jab injected as US eyes J&J rollout (2021, March 1) retrieved 27

April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-world-covax-jab-eyes-jj.html>

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