

Cyprus cabinet rolls up sleeves for troubled AZ jab

April 14 2021



Medics in the Cypriot mountain village of Kyperounta prepare to inoculate a resident with the AstraZeneca vaccine

In a bid to encourage reluctant islanders to take AstraZeneca jabs, members of the Greek Cypriot cabinet are to stage a joint Covid-19

vaccination event on Thursday to try to shore up public trust.

Cypriots are wary of choosing the AstraZeneca vaccine after highly publicised deaths linked to rare blood clotting incidents after taking the jab.

On Wednesday, government spokesman Kyriacos Koushos said cabinet members who have not been vaccinated will together receive the AstraZeneca shot at a centre in Nicosia.

"It will send a message of confidence in the vaccine's safety and efficacy," Koushos said in a written statement.

Foreign Minister Nikos Christodoulides is to be vaccinated next Monday as he is abroad on official business.

The move comes as vaccinations hit a speed bump following reports of a possible link between the AZ vaccine and rare cases of blood clotting.

Cypriots eligible for vaccination have shown a clear preference for Pfizer or Moderna jabs after doubts surrounding AstraZeneca.

Reassurances from the European Medicines Agency that the AZ vaccine's benefits outweigh the risks have done little to boost confidence.

The island's online vaccination portal opened on Tuesday for people aged 55 and 56 with 20,000 appointments available, the majority for AstraZeneca.

But thousands of slots remained open, with people preferring to wait for Pfizer or Moderna, the health ministry said.

It was the same last week for those aged 57 and 58, with thousands of AZ jabs not taken up.

The Cyprus Mail newspaper reported Wednesday that the vaccination portal has been updated "to combat system crashes as the public manoeuvres to avoid the AstraZeneca shot put pressure on it and doctors alike".

"We spend all day either trying to book vaccines for patients or reassuring patients over the phone that AstraZeneca is safe," Andreas Polynikis, chairman of a family physicians group, told the daily.

AstraZeneca is the cornerstone of the Cyprus government's vaccination rollout.

Cypriots not coming forward for the jab hampers plans to vaccinate 60 percent of the one-million population by the end of June.

The official Cyprus News Agency said the country was to receive some 2,400 of the Johnson & Johnson [vaccine](#) on Wednesday afternoon but it was "unknown if it will be distributed" due to blood clot cases reported in the United States.

Government-controlled southern Cyprus has registered more than 52,000 confirmed cases of [coronavirus](#) infection and over 270 deaths since the pandemic reached its shores in February-March 2020.

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Citation: Cyprus cabinet rolls up sleeves for troubled AZ jab (2021, April 14) retrieved 24 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-04-cyprus-cabinet-sleeves-az-jab.html>

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