

EU-AstraZeneca vaccine court hearing set for May 26

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The European Union and AstraZeneca will begin their oral arguments on May 26 in the bloc's legal action against the pharmaceutical giant over coronavirus vaccine shortfalls, a Belgian court said Wednesday.

The EU is suing AstraZeneca for allegedly breaking their purchase

agreement by massively under-delivering doses of the COVID-19 jab for its 27 member states.

The British-Swedish company has dismissed the case as "without merit" and insisted it will fight it fiercely in the Belgian courts, which have jurisdiction over the deal.

The [legal action](#)—which started Wednesday with a procedural session in a Brussels court—is being expedited to speed up a ruling.

The EU says the case is aimed at ramping up deliveries of the doses it is entitled to and pressing the firm to use plants in Britain mentioned in the contract to supply the bloc.

"The (European) Commission and the member states believe that AstraZeneca has violated many obligations under the pre-order contract, regarding the production as well as the delivery of vaccines," Rafael Jafferli, a lawyer for the EU, told AFP.

"We will explain this to the court."

AstraZeneca's legal counsel Hakim Boularbah said the firm "deeply regrets" the EU's decision to launch the action.

"We hope to resolve this dispute as soon as possible," he told journalists.

The row erupted between the European Commission and AstraZeneca after major delivery shortages hampered early efforts to roll out inoculations across the drive.

The EU executive—which is responsible for ordering vaccines for the bloc—says overall the firm is set to deliver only a third of the 300 million doses it has promised by the end of June.

AstraZeneca's boss has insisted the company only committed to a "best reasonable efforts" clause to meet supply targets, and it says it is on course to deliver almost 50 million doses by the end of this month.

The commission says the contract shows greater legal responsibility and officials have pointed out that the company has largely delivered promised doses to Britain, where it is headquartered.

The EU initially intended to use the AstraZeneca jab as the main workhorse to power the bloc's inoculation drive—but has now switched focus to the more expensive BioNTech/Pfizer [vaccine](#) as its mainstay.

The bloc is hoping an uptick in deliveries of vaccines from Pfizer, Moderna and the single-shot Johnson & Johnson jabs can help it gain ground on inoculation pacesetters like the United States and Britain.

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