

Uzbekistan begins jab drive with AstraZeneca, Chinese vaccine

April 1 2021



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Uzbekistan on Thursday began coronavirus vaccinations, offering citizens a choice between AstraZeneca and a Chinese-made vaccine that the Central Asian country plans to start producing soon.

Russian, Western and Chinese vaccines are all in play in ex-Soviet Central Asia, with Uzbekistan's neighbour Kazakhstan producing and

distributing Russia's Sputnik V jab and another neighbour Kyrgyzstan starting vaccinations with China's Sinopharm last week.

But as in other parts of the world, rollout delays and [vaccine](#) scepticism have raised fears of an extended pandemic, which proved particularly brutal for the region's countries last summer.

Uzbeks vaccinated on Thursday and interviewed by AFP had mostly opted for AstraZeneca instead of the vaccine developed by China's Anhui Zhifei Longcom Biopharmaceutical Co.

"Now I will have to hope that everything goes well," said Makhfuza Tuichibayeva, a retired doctor, who did not explain her choice of AstraZeneca, which Uzbekistan received over 600,000 doses of through the Covax programme.

Pavel Prosvirin, another pensioner, also picked AstraZeneca.

"So far I am feeling fine," he told AFP.

The republic of 34 million people is targeting medics and citizens over 65 in its first wave of inoculations.

Retired university professor Malika Khadjayeva told AFP that she had opted to get a shot of the Chinese ZF-UZ-VAC 2001 vaccine that Uzbekistan expects to start producing in the coming months.

"I am up to date with what is happening," she said, noting "very good results" the vaccine had produced in third stage trials carried out in Uzbekistan and other countries.

Khadjayeva said that she hoped Uzbekistan would avoid another summer like last year, when the coronavirus overwhelmed both its own

health system and those of its neighbours.

"(Our) people have learned how to protect themselves and their close ones," Khadjayeva said.

Uzbekistan's health minister Abdukhakim Khadjibayev said authorities planned to vaccinate around four million people by the end of June.

An online poll by a state-endorsed non-profit organisation called Yuksalish showed this month that 44 percent of more than 19,000 respondents did not intend to get vaccinated and showed Sputnik—also registered in Uzbekistan—as the preferred vaccine choice.

Next door, Kazakhstan's president Kassym-Jomart Tokayev said Thursday that his country of 19 million people was "falling behind", with only 47,000 people fully vaccinated against [coronavirus](#) since the rollout began at the start of last month.

"The reason for this situation is simple—lack of vaccines," Tokayev said

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Citation: Uzbekistan begins jab drive with AstraZeneca, Chinese vaccine (2021, April 1)
retrieved 4 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-04-uzbekistan-jab-astrazeneca-chinese-vaccine.html>

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