

# EU agrees potential 1.8 billion-dose purchase of Pfizer jab

May 8 2021, by Raf Casert and Barry Hatton

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In this Friday, April 23, 2021 file photo, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen makes a statement during an official visit to the Pfizer pharmaceutical company in Puurs, Belgium. The European Union has cemented its support for Pfizer-BioNTech and its novel COVID-19 vaccine technology by agreeing to a massive contract extension for a potential 1.8 billion doses through 2023. EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen tweeted that her office "has just approved a contract for a guaranteed 900 million doses (+900 million options)." (John Thys, Pool via AP, File)

The European Union cemented its support for Pfizer-BioNTech and its novel COVID-19 vaccine technology Saturday by agreeing to a massive contract extension for a potential 1.8 billion doses through 2023.

EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said her office has approved a contract for a guaranteed 900 million doses with the same amount of doses as a future option.

The new contract, which has the unanimous backing of the 27 EU member nations, will entail not only the production of the vaccines but also making sure that all the essential components are sourced from the EU.

The European Commission currently has a portfolio of 2.6 billion doses from half a dozen companies. Pfizer-BioNTech had an initial contract of 600 million doses with the EU.

Saturday's announcement also underscores the confidence the EU has shown in the technology behind the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which is different from how the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine works.

"But of course, we will also explore other contracts, for example, based on other technologies like the protein-based technologies. The key point is to keep our options open," von der Leyen said at an EU summit in Portugal.

The active ingredient in the Pfizer-BioNTech shot is messenger RNA, or mRNA, which contains the instructions for human cells to construct a harmless piece of the coronavirus called the spike protein. The human immune system recognizes the spike protein as foreign, allowing it to mount a response against the virus upon infection.



In this Friday, April 23, 2021 file photo, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, second left, speaks with Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla, center right, during an official visit to the Pfizer pharmaceutical company in Puurs, Belgium. The European Union cemented its support for Pfizer-BioNTech and its novel COVID-19 vaccine technology on Saturday, May 8, 2021 by agreeing to a massive contract extension for a potential 1.8 billion doses through 2023. The new contract, which has the backing of the EU member states, will entail not only the production of the vaccines, but also making sure that all the essential components should be sourced from the EU. (John Thys/Pool via AP, File)

The announcement of the huge contract extension comes as the EU is looking for ways to meet the challenges of providing the necessary booster shots to people who have already receive a vaccine dose,



expanding vaccination drives to include children and teenagers, and the emergence of possible new virus variants.

The size of the contract - 1.8 billion doses for a bloc of 450 million residents - will provide for a lot of options, von der Leyen said.

"That includes the possibility for the member states to donate or resell doses" at a lower price to help nations in the immediate neighborhood or beyond, she said..

America's Pfizer and Germany's BioNTech have already said that they would provide the EU with an extra 50 million doses in the 2nd quarter of this year, making up for faltering deliveries of AstraZeneca.



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen puts on her protective face mask during a media conference at an EU summit in Porto, Portugal, Saturday, May 8, 2021. On Saturday, EU leaders held an online summit with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering trade, climate change and help with India's COVID-19 surge. (AP Photo/Luis Vieira)



In this Friday, April 30, 2021 file photo, a pharmacist fills a syringe with a vial of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine at the Vaccine Village in Antwerp, Belgium. The European Union cemented its support for Pfizer-BioNTech and its novel COVID-19 vaccine technology Saturday, May 8, 2021 by agreeing to a massive contract extension for a potential 1.8 billion doses through 2023. The new contract, which has the backing of the EU member states, will entail not only the production of the vaccines, but also making sure that all the essential components should be sourced from the EU. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo, File)



In this Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 file photo, a sign is pasted into an upper window at Pfizer manufacturing center in Puurs, Belgium. The European Union cemented its support for Pfizer-BioNTech and its novel COVID-19 vaccine technology, Saturday, May 8, 2021 by agreeing to a massive contract extension for a potential 1.8 billion doses through 2023. The new contract, which has the backing of the EU member states, will entail not only the production of the vaccines, but also making sure that all the essential components should be sourced from the EU. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo, File)





European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen speaks during a media conference at an EU summit in Porto, Portugal, Saturday, May 8, 2021. On Saturday, EU leaders held an online summit with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering trade, climate change and help with India's COVID-19 surge. (AP Photo/Luis Vieira)



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen takes off her protective face mask prior to addressing a media conference at an EU summit in Porto, Portugal, Saturday, May 8, 2021. On Saturday, EU leaders held an online summit with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi, covering trade, climate change and help with India's COVID-19 surge. (AP Photo/Luis Vieira, Pool)

In contrast to the oft-criticized Anglo-Swedish AstraZeneca, von der Leyen has said that Pfizer-BioNTech is a reliable partner that delivers on its commitments.

Two weeks ago, the EU launched legal proceedings against AstraZeneca for failing to respect the terms of its contract with the 27-nation bloc.

The AstraZeneca vaccine had been central to Europe's immunization campaign, and a linchpin in the global strategy to get vaccines to poorer



countries. But the slow pace of deliveries has frustrated the Europeans and they have held the company responsible for partly delaying their vaccine rollout.

So far, von der Leyen said, the EU has made some 200 million doses available to its 450 million residents while almost as many have been exported from the bloc.

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