

# Taiwan, feuding with China, gets vaccines from Japan

June 4 2021, by Huizhong Wu and Mari Yamaguchi

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The containers carrying the coronavirus vaccines donated by Japanese government, are loaded to a plane before its departure for Taiwan, at Narita International Airport in Narita, east of Tokyo, Friday, June 4, 2021. Japan is donating 1.24 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine to Taiwan to help the island fight its latest resurgence of the COVID-19 cases, as Tokyo, despite its painfully slow vaccine rollouts at home, tries to play a greater role in global vaccination distribution. Credit: Sadayuki Goto/Kyodo News via AP

A flight carrying 1.24 million doses of AstraZeneca coronavirus vaccine from Japan touched down in Taiwan on Friday to help the vaccine-starved island fight its largest outbreak since the pandemic began.

The donation underscores how geopolitics has come to impact the global vaccine rollout, as countries scramble to secure enough doses for their populations. Taiwan, a self-governing island struggling to get enough doses, has blamed China for interfering in a potential deal for another vaccine.

Now it is more than doubling its vaccine supply thanks to Japan, which is trying to play a greater role in global vaccination distribution and accelerate its own slow rollout ahead of the Tokyo Olympics in July.

Japanese Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi told reporters on Friday that Japan was responding to a Taiwanese request, and that the donation reflects "Japan's important partnership and friendship with Taiwan."

Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen echoed those comments, saying after the Japan Airlines flight landed that "we are witnessing once again the true friendship between Taiwan and Japan, built upon shared values and mutual help."

Neither side mentioned an ongoing feud between Taiwan and China over the island's efforts to get the vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech.

Taiwan has signed contracts for 10 million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, 5.05 million doses of the Moderna vaccine, and 4.76 million doses of vaccines through COVAX, a U.N. program to distribute vaccines to low and middle-income countries. It is also pursuing the development of its own vaccines, which are currently in mid-stage testing.



A plane waits on tarmac for loading the cargos before its departure for Taiwan, at Narita International Airport in Narita, east of Tokyo, Friday, June 4, 2021. Japan is donating 1.24 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine to Taiwan to help the island fight its latest resurgence of the COVID-19 cases, as Tokyo, despite its painfully slow vaccine rollouts at home, tries to play a greater role in global vaccination distribution. Credit: Sadayuki Goto/Kyodo News via AP

However, given global supply constraints and manufacturing delays, it had only about 700,000 doses to vaccinate its population with last month, all AstraZeneca's shots. Japan reportedly considered sending vaccines to Taiwan through COVAX, but decided the process would take too long.

Tsai accused China last month of blocking Taiwan from getting the Pfizer vaccine through BioNTech, the German co-developer.

"We were almost finished with the contract with the German supplier, but owing to China's interference, it's been delayed so that until now we have no way to complete it," she told members of her Democratic Progressive Party.

Health Minister Chen Shih-chung later said that BioNTech had asked Taiwan to change the word "country" in the press release announcing the deal. Taiwan agreed, but the deal still remains unfinished.

China, which claims Taiwan as its territory, objects to calling the island a country. China is also a potentially major market for BioNTech, which has partnered with Shanghai-based Fosun Pharma to manufacture its vaccine in China and distribute it in the mainland and Hong Kong.

Fosun said in an interview with China's official Xinhua News Agency that it has offered to sell the vaccines to Taiwan. However, Taiwanese law bans Chinese-made medical products, including vaccines.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin accused Taiwan's governing party of preventing the mainland from sending vaccines to Taiwan and falsely claiming that China has hindered its procurement of vaccines.



A plane carrying the vaccine cargo donated by Japanese government, takes off Narita International Airport in Narita, east of Tokyo, Friday, June 4, 2021. Japan is donating 1.24 million doses of AstraZeneca vaccine to Taiwan to help the island fight its latest resurgence of the COVID-19 cases, as Tokyo, despite its painfully slow vaccine rollouts at home, tries to play a greater role in global vaccination distribution. Credit: Kyodo News via AP

"For their own political self-interest, the Democratic Progressive Party authorities continue to engage in political manipulation in anti-epidemic cooperation," he said Friday. "It disregards the lives and health of Taiwan compatriots and violates the basic humanitarian spirit."

Taiwan's foreign minister, Joseph Wu, has also accused China of pressuring at least one country, Paraguay, to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan in return for Chinese vaccines.

China says its overseas assistance comes without political conditions, though it has aggressively used its economic might since Tsai came to power to try to poach Taiwan's few remaining allies.

Globally, many countries are struggling to get vaccines as manufacturers face delays in scaling up production quickly.

Japan, with its home-developed vaccines still uncertain, relies solely on foreign ones. It is using Pfizer and Moderna doses but has no immediate plan to use AstraZeneca's, which are produced in Japan under a licensing deal.

At an online vaccine summit this week, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga pledged an additional \$800 million for the COVAX program, bringing Japan's total contribution to \$1 billion. Tokyo plans to donate 30 million doses of [vaccine](#) produced in Japan through COVAX as well as other multilateral and bilateral channels.

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