

Hungarian capital offers tests amid vaccine efficacy worries

July 9 2021, by Justin Spike



A staff member takes blood for an antibody test in Budapest, Thursday , July 8, 2021. Hungary's capital city is offering free antibody testing to its elderly residents, a bid to pressure the central government to take action over concerns that certain COVID-19 vaccines do not provide adequate protection against the virus. Credit: AP Photo/Laszlo Balogh

Hungary's capital city is offering free antibody testing to its elderly residents in a bid to ratchet up pressure on the government over concerns that certain vaccines don't provide adequate protection against the coronavirus.

The offer of 20,000 free tests, available for Budapest residents over 60, came after many fully vaccinated people reported that tests they had undergone at private laboratories indicated that they hadn't developed antibodies to defend against COVID-19.

Budapest Deputy Mayor Ambrus Kiss said those reports came primarily from people who received China's Sinopharm [vaccine](#), convincing [city leaders](#) that there was "a genuine problem." He said the government should consider offering third doses to those with inadequate immune response.

"If there is such a loss of confidence in certain vaccines, then the government needs to order a third dose and free up the capacities for giving them," Kiss told The Associated Press, adding that the tests are available to anyone over 60 regardless of which vaccine they received.

"We think the the more tests we perform, the more societal pressure there is for a third dose," Kiss said. The testing drive will continue next week, and initial results will likely be released next week with the full results expected by the end of the month.



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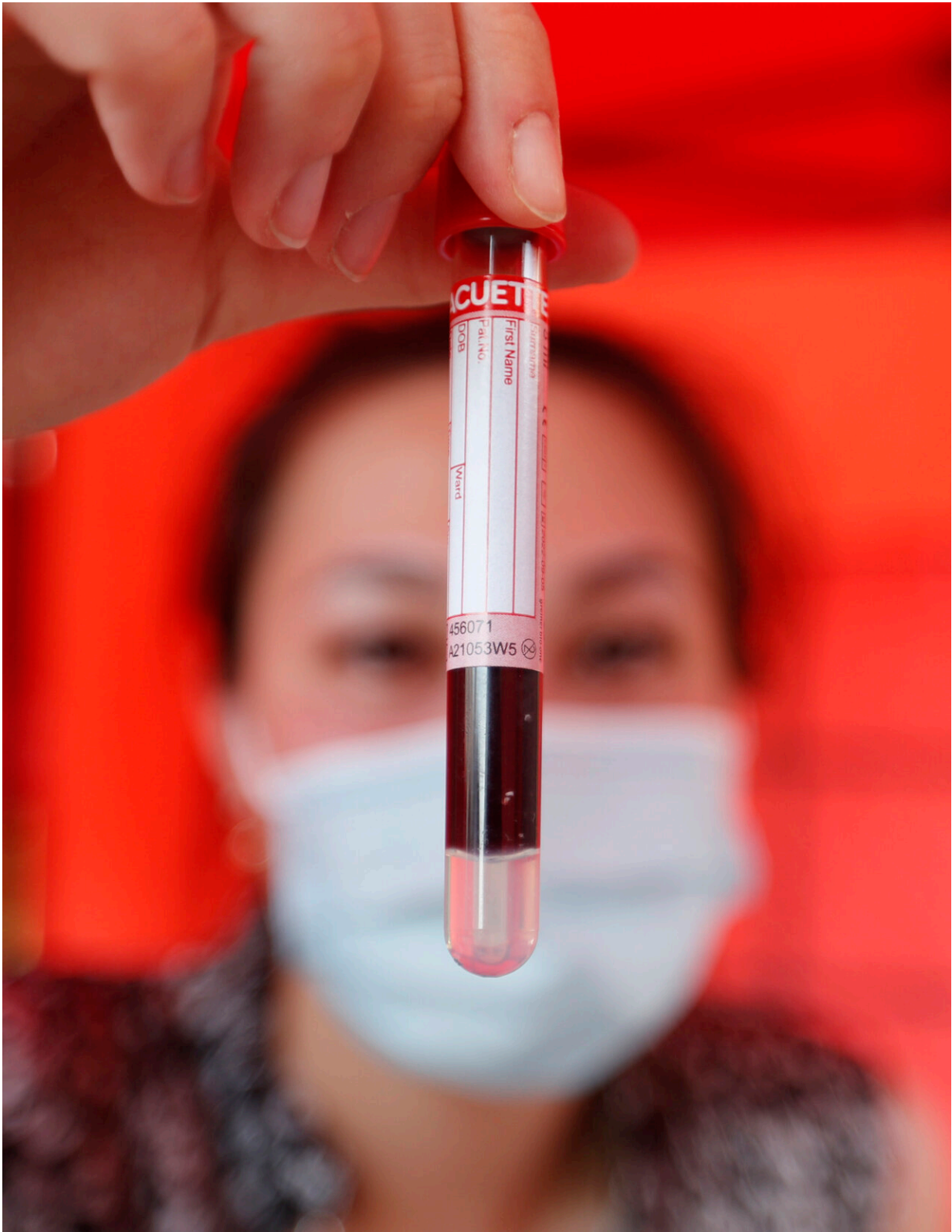
Hungary was an [early vaccination leader in the European Union](#), due largely to its procurement of jabs from eastern countries like Russia and China, on top of vaccines received through the EU.

It was the first country in the 27-member bloc to approve Russia's Sputnik V vaccine, and is the only one to deploy China's Sinopharm. More than 5.1 million doses of the jab have been distributed to Hungary,

of which it has administered more than 2 million, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

While government officials insist there is no reason to offer a third dose of the Sinopharm vaccine, critics of the jab - including Budapest's liberal mayor Gergely Karacsony - have cast doubt over its efficacy.

In announcing the city's antibody testing campaign in June, Karacsony referred specifically to the Chinese vaccine as the reason for the measure. He pointed to other countries like Bahrein and the United Arab Emirates, which have offered booster shots for some Sinopharm recipients amid efficacy concerns.



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antibody test in Budapest, Thursday , July 8, 2021. Hungary's capital city is offering free antibody testing to its elderly residents, a bid to pressure the central government to take action over concerns that certain COVID-19 vaccines do not provide adequate protection against the virus. Credit: AP Photo/Laszlo Balogh



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Both Sinopharm and Sinovac, another Chinese company who has produced its own vaccine, said in April that they were looking at whether a booster shot could help better protect against COVID-19.

Karacsony often spars with Hungary's right-wing government and is

considered a front-runner for replacing Prime Minister Viktor Orban in national elections next year.

Sinopharm jab recipient Maria Szaniszlo, 78, said she backed a move to offer booster shots to anyone who needs them.

"There is news that the Chinese vaccine isn't reliable because it doesn't offer protection to many people," said Szaniszlo after showing up on Thursday for an antibody test in the capital. "I decided that I wanted to know too ... They sent me the (immunity) card saying I'm protected, but I'll find out tomorrow if I really am."

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Citation: Hungarian capital offers tests amid vaccine efficacy worries (2021, July 9) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-07-hungarian-capital-vaccine-efficacy.html>

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