

World faces shortage of syringes as COVID vaccine doses rise

October 28 2021, by Cara Anna



In this Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021 file photo, a health worker prepares a dose of China's Sinopharm vaccine during the start of a vaccination campaign against COVID-19 at the Health Ministry in Dakar, Senegal. African health officials and the United Nations warned Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021 of a looming shortage of up to 2 billion syringes for mainly low- and middle-income countries around the world. Credit: AP Photo/Leo Correa, File

African health officials and the United Nations are warning of a looming shortage of more than 2 billion syringes for mainly low- and middle-income countries around the world as the supply of COVID-19 doses rises, and routine vaccinations could be affected, too.

The U.N. children's agency said the shortfall would affect up to 2.2 billion auto-disposable syringes that lock automatically to prevent them from being used again. "We are not anticipating a significant supply shortage of the more standard syringes used in [high-income countries](#)," the agency said in a statement. It blamed "significantly higher demand," supply chain disruptions, national bans on [syringe](#) exports and an unpredictable supply of vaccines.

The threatened shortage comes as the flow of COVID-19 vaccine doses increases after months of delays to the African continent, the world's least protected region with less than 6% of its population of 1.3 billion people fully vaccinated. Just five of Africa's 54 countries are expected to reach the target of fully vaccinating 40% of their populations by year's end.

"The scarcity of syringes could paralyze progress," the World Health Organization's Africa director, Matshidiso Moeti, told reporters on Thursday. Already, some African countries including South Africa, Kenya and Rwanda have seen delays in receiving syringes, the WHO said.



In this Tuesday, May 25, 2021 file photo, a health worker picks syringes as seniors get vaccinated with the first dose of the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine at the newly-opened mass vaccination program for the elderly at a drive-thru vaccination center in Johannesburg, South Africa. African health officials and the United Nations warned Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021 of a looming shortage of up to 2 billion syringes for mainly low- and middle-income countries around the world. Credit: AP Photo/Themba Hadebe, File

Routine childhood vaccinations "are going to be impacted," said Sibusiso Hlatjwako of the health organization PATH, which forecasts that the problem could persist "way into 2022." PATH looked at data from manufacturers and said more than 100 countries around the world use the auto-disposable syringes affected.

Overall, the modeling "shows a sizeable gap now," he said.

The syringe shortage is already complicating COVID-19 vaccination efforts in Rwanda, which has been receiving COVID-19 vaccines with a "very short shelf life" of sometimes a month or two before expiration dates, Sabin Nsanzimana with the Rwanda Biomedical Center told reporters.

"You have to get these syringes in a short timeline," he said, "otherwise you have vaccines expiring in your hands."

Health officials said another complication is that the Pfizer vaccine for COVID-19, used widely across Africa, requires a new and different syringe. There is no global stockpile for the new auto-disposable syringe, and the market for them is "tight and extremely competitive," the WHO said.



In this Friday, March 5, 2021 file photo, a nurse prepares to administer a dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine manufactured by the Serum Institute of India and provided through the global COVAX initiative, at Kenyatta National Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya. African health officials and the United Nations warned Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021 of a looming shortage of up to 2 billion syringes for mainly low- and middle-income countries around the world. Credit: AP Photo/Ben Curtis, File



In this June 3, 2021 file photo an elderly patient receives a dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, at a clinic at Orange Farm, near Johannesburg, South Africa. African health officials and the United Nations warned Thursday, Oct. 28, 2021 of a looming shortage of up to 2 billion syringes for mainly low- and middle-income countries around the world. Credit: AP Photo/Denis Farrell, File

The African continent has few syringe manufacturers and none that make the Pfizer one, the WHO said.

COVID-19 [vaccine](#) donations to African countries are now surpassing syringe availability, and countries in some cases are having to source syringes separately, WHO vaccination official Phionah Atuhebwe told reporters. "Without a plan, we should be in big trouble."

African health officials say the African continent is seeing a downward trend in new COVID-19 cases and deaths over the past month, but Moeti warned that another increase could come around the approaching holiday season.

The African continent has had more than 8.4 million confirmed cases of COVID-19, including more than 218,000 deaths.

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