

South Korea to roll out Novavax COVID-19 vaccine next week

February 10 2022, by Kim Tong-Hyung



A worker moves boxes carrying Novavax Inc.'s COVID-19 vaccine at SK Bioscience Co. in Andong, South Korea, on Feb. 9, 2022. South Korea will begin offering Novavax Inc.'s COVID-19 vaccine at hospitals, nursing homes and public health centers next week, adding another tool to fight a fast-developing omicron surge. Credit: Kim Hyun-tae/Yonhap via AP

South Korea will begin offering Novavax Inc.'s COVID-19 vaccine at hospitals, nursing homes and public health centers next week, officials said, adding another tool to fight a fast-developing omicron surge.

The country reported a record 54,122 new coronavirus cases on Thursday, according to the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency, a 12-fold increase from daily levels seen in mid-January, when omicron first became the country's dominant strain.

But officials are expressing cautious hope that the country's high vaccination rate will prevent an explosion in serious illnesses and deaths. As of Thursday, 86% of South Koreans were fully vaccinated and 56% had received booster shots under a mass immunization program that has been mainly dependent on Pfizer and Moderna's mRNA vaccines.

Novavax's protein vaccine, which is similar to shots used for years against diseases such as the common flu and hepatitis B, could appeal to people who are hesitant to use other COVID-19 vaccines designed with newer technologies, KDCA official Lim Sook-young said.

The shots are produced by the Maryland company's South Korean partner, SK Bioscience, which has been contracted to manufacture 40 million doses, all of which will be used locally. Lim said SK delivered 551,000 doses on Thursday and will deliver another 294,000 doses on Friday.



A man has a nasal swab sample taken by a medical worker at a makeshift testing site in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, Feb. 10, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon



A medical worker gestures to guide people as they wait for their coronavirus test at a makeshift testing site in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, Feb. 10, 2022.

Credit: AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon



People wait for their coronavirus test at a makeshift testing site in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday, Feb. 10, 2022. Credit: AP Photo/Ahn Young-joon



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"We plan to actively use the (Novavax) shots on unvaccinated people 18 years or older, especially high-risk groups including hospitalized patients, [senior citizens](#) and people with disabilities who are at larger risk of serious illness and death," Lim said during a briefing.

South Korea has significantly eased quarantine restrictions and reshaped its COVID-19 response around at-home treatments and rapid antigen testing as it struggles to deal with an unprecedented wave of infections fueled by the fast-moving omicron variant.

The KDCA said 282 patients were in serious or [critical condition](#) as of

Thursday, but the Health Ministry said less than 20% of the country's intensive care units designated for COVID-19 treatment were occupied. Still, experts say the country's surging caseload is likely to drive up hospitalizations in coming weeks.

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