

# Roll-out of Omicron-specific vaccine delayed to autumn: German minister

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Germany's Health Minister Karl Lauterbach said he expected the roll-out of a vaccine specifically against the Omicron variant of the coronavirus would be delayed for months, until autumn.

Speaking as he went into a Brussels meeting of EU health ministers, Lauterbach said: "September could be the target month."

The EU relies mostly on mRNA COVID vaccines, particularly the one developed jointly by German firm BioNTech with US giant Pfizer.

The delivery of Omicron-specific vaccines had been expected early this year.

Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla had said in January his company would have one available in March. Then BioNTech founder Ugur Sahin said last month he expected it to be available in April or May.

While the European Union has seen COVID hospitalisations and deaths decline after a successful vaccination programme, confirmed new cases have been rising again, driven by the highly contagious Omicron variant.

Omicron, which was first detected in southern Africa in November last year and rapidly spread globally, is now the dominant variant, accounting for almost all new cases.

It has mutations allowing it to dodge some of the defences generated by current vaccines and from previous infections, and comes in two main sub-lineages: BA.1 and BA.2, with the latter gaining ground.

While COVID vaccines developed for previous strains have shown they largely stave off serious health consequences, they have proved more muted in preventing infections in the first place.

That factor has become more important given that the potency of current vaccines wanes after a few [months](#), which has prompted booster campaigns.

BioNTech/Pfizer and mRNA rival Moderna both said in late January they had launched clinical trials of Omicron-specific vaccines.

While the results are yet to be published, early studies on animals suggest they "offer no advantage over a third dose of current vaccines," according to an article in the science journal Nature last month.

One of the studies, on eight [rhesus macaques](#), found that boosters from both original COVID vaccines and from Omicron-specific ones improved antibody response, but with no clear advantage for the latter.

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