

BioNTech mobile mRNA vaccine labs reach Rwanda

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Six mobile vaccine production units by German pharma company BioNTech arrived in Rwanda on Monday, the first such shipments to Africa as the continent seeks to boost mRNA vaccine manufacturing.

The units, made from recycled [shipping containers](#), arrived in the capital Kigali, where they will be assembled to make a [vaccine](#) production hub for jabs against a variety of illnesses.

"This is a historic moment," said BioNTech's chief operating officer Sierk Poetting.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed Africa's huge dependence on imported vaccines.

Less than 50 percent of the continent's 1.2 billion people are fully inoculated against COVID-19, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The facility in Kigali—capable of producing up to 100 million mRNA vaccines per year—will take at least 12 months before it starts producing doses.

"The technology is scalable... It is also flexible so you can move it anywhere," said Poetting, without providing details on the overall cost of the project.

The containers, dubbed BioNTainer, will also pioneer treatments in the [development phase](#) against diseases like malaria, tuberculosis and HIV that are among the leading killers in Africa.

"We are also thinking of cancer therapies that we are developing to be produced in these BioNTainers," said Poetting.

BioNTech said it had employed nine local scientists, with a plan to increase staffing to at least 100 by next year and eventually have local employees run the facility.

Rwanda will distribute the vaccines to the 55-member African Union bloc.

"This shows the power of science, partnerships and humanity, what people can do to fight a terrifying pandemic," Health Minister Sabin Nsanzimana said.

Rwanda's facility is the first of three slated for Africa with deliveries planned for South Africa and Senegal, according to BioNTech.

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