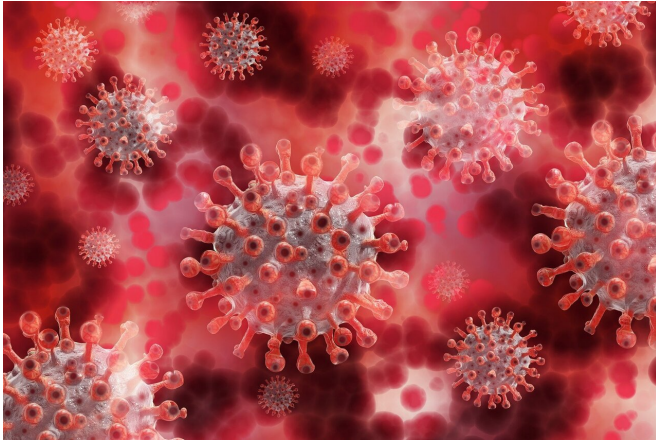


One third of Africa will be vaccinated this year: WHO

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Africa can expect to see at least 30 percent of its population immunised against coronavirus by the end of 2021, the World Health Organization said Thursday, as vaccines begin trickling into the continent.

It is estimated Africa will need 1.5 billion [vaccine doses](#) to immunise 60 percent of its 1.3 billion inhabitants, the threshold for herd immunity against COVID-19.

But the continent has fallen behind in the global [vaccine](#) scramble, as wealthier nations have been accused of bulk-buying excess doses directly from manufacturers.

Most African countries are relying on the World Health Organization (WHO) and the African Union (AU) to shoulder at least part of their inoculation campaigns—providing vaccines and helping to finance their roll out.

WHO Africa's immunisation coordinator Richard Mihigo said the WHO-backed Covax vaccine sharing facility and the AU's African Vaccine

Acquisition Task Team (AVATT) would jointly deliver enough doses to vaccinate between 30 to 35 percent of the continent's population this year.

"Given the latest developments within the Covax facility, there is a very good prospect that the objective to supply 600 million doses by the end of 2021 will definitely be reached," Mihigo told a virtual press briefing.

The Covax vaccines will cover at least 20 percent of the population, with the rest "complemented" by AVATT, he added.

While the AU has so far secured 270 million doses through AVATT, Mihigo warned "some of those may not become available soon" and that the initiative could "realistically" only expect to reach between 10 and 15 percent of the continent in 2021.

The bulk of Covax and AVATT provisions will be shots of Oxford/AstraZeneca's vaccine, followed by a few million Pfizer-BioNTech jabs.

Mihigo said the WHO was exploring "additional candidates", with particularly high hopes for Johnson & Johnson's one-shot vaccine.

So far only a small handful of African countries have started vaccinating their populations, including Guinea, Mauritius and the Seychelles.

Morocco is expected to begin administering the shots this week, while South Africa announced on Wednesday that a first batch of 1.5 million AstraZeneca vaccines would arrive on February 1.

Mihigo said the first Covax doses were likely to reach the continent by mid-February, and that "by March we will definitely see most of the countries start vaccinating".

"It is a slow start but we are expecting that in the

coming months things are going to ramp up."

To date Africa has recorded close to 3.5 million [coronavirus](#) cases and 88,000 deaths, according to a tally compiled by AFP.

A new virus variant first detected in South Africa that is thought to be more contagious has cropped up in at least six African countries and 24 worldwide, according to the WHO.

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