

# South Africa launches vaccine drive, first to administer J&J shot

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Presidential jab: Cyril Ramaphosa was among the first to get the protective shot

South Africa launched its long-awaited coronavirus vaccine campaign on Wednesday while also becoming the first country worldwide to administer inoculations by US pharma giant Johnson & Johnson.

President Cyril Ramaphosa was among the first to be inoculated after the rollout was delayed earlier this month.

South Africa on February 1 received a million doses of the Oxford/AstraZeneca formula but decided against administering it over concerns of whether it would protect against a widespread variant.

It instead went with the vaccine by Johnson & Johnson as it bids to begin taming the pandemic in Africa's hardest-hit nation.

A maternity nurse at a hospital in Khayelitsha township in Cape Town was the first to be immunised, hours after the first batch of 80,000 doses landed in the country from Brussels late

Tuesday.

She looked relaxed as she received the jab, which was broadcast on live television.

After five [healthcare workers](#) got their jabs, it was Ramaphosa's turn.

Before taking off his jacket and rolling up a long white shirt sleeve, he asked the nurse administering the jab if there would be any side effects.

"This day represents a real milestone for us as South Africans that finally the vaccines are here and they are being administered," he said as he left the hospital to go to parliament.

Upbeat, he predicted the rollout would be "flawless."

"This is a new era for us," he said.

## **Pfizer on the way**

South Africa took delivery of the new vaccines late Tuesday at an event that was closed to the press, in contrast to the fanfare two weeks ago when it received the Oxford/AstraZeneca jabs.

The new vaccines, only recently approved by the national health authorities, were rushed to 32 countrywide vaccination centres overnight.

Immunisations rolled into gear at several other centres including at one of Africa's largest hospitals, Chris Hani Baragwanath, in Soweto township.

The stock is part of a consignment of nine million doses that South Africa secured from the US pharmaceutical giant.

The first doses will target healthcare workers as

part of a study by the country's medical research authority. © 2021 AFP

The country suspended its vaccine rollout after a study found the Oxford/AstraZeneca jab failed to prevent mild and moderate illness caused by a variant found in South Africa.

The Johnson & Johnson single shot vaccine has been proven to be 57 effective against the variant, whose lab name is 501Y.V2.

It is however 66 percent effective against the original COVID-19 and up to 85 percent effective against serious forms of infection.

Those vaccines will be supplemented by 20 million doses of the Pfizer formula and more that will be secured through the World Health Organization-backed Covax facility and the African Union (AU).

### **Healthcare 'soldiers'**

The government plans to immunise around 40 million people, or two-thirds of the population, by year's end.

South Africa has recorded nearly 1.5 million [coronavirus](#) infections, including more than 48,000 deaths.

It is emerging from a second wave of infections—fuelled by the new strain of the virus—and has seen the number of daily new cases drop from highs of 20,000 in early January to slightly over 1,000 this week.

Health Minister Zweli Mkhize, who was also vaccinated shortly after Ramaphosa, commended health workers for confronting the pandemic "like soldiers in the war who will stand up and face the enemy even though they lose their comrades".

Khayelitsha, a sprawling township and home to at least 400,000 people, became a hotspot during the first wave when it was identified as the worst hit in the country.

"This [vaccine](#) gives us hope," said Sa'ad Lahri, an emergency doctor at Khayelitsha District Hospital.

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