

Virus-hit Papua New Guinea starts vaccine roll-out

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Papua New Guinea's prime minister launched a nationwide coronavirus vaccine roll-out Tuesday, hoping to quell a runaway outbreak and counter widespread public hesitancy about jabs.

James Marape said a batch of 100,000 vaccines had arrived in Papua New Guinea and would be distributed countrywide, as he urged sceptical health workers and the [general public](#) to get vaccinated.

"We want to reduce and prevent deaths of our people," he said, launching the "Sleeves Up" campaign.

After weathering the initial stages of the pandemic, the country has recorded most of its 11,262 COVID-19 cases and 115 known deaths since February 2021.

Only 93,000 tests have been carried out among a population of nine million, so the real number of infections is feared to be much higher.

"If you have no need to go to a [public place](#) outside

of your home or workplace, stay put wherever you are," Marape said.

The outbreak has pushed the nation's health system to the limit, with hospitals turning away patients due to a lack of medical staff and a temporary field hospital set up in a sports stadium.

Overwhelmed medics have tested positive in their hundreds, but many have been refusing vaccines.

Only half of an emergency Australian delivery of more than 8,000 [vaccine](#) doses for frontline staff in Port Moresby have reportedly been used.

Vaccine misinformation is widespread and there is concern about the safety of the AstraZeneca product after a small number of widely reported health scares overseas.

In March, health minister Jelta Wong gave AFP government polling which showed significant vaccine scepticism among the broader public, with many citing safety or religious concerns.

The survey found that nearly 10 percent of Papua New Guineans would refuse a vaccine, with the figure above a quarter of the population in remote Highland provinces.

That is where the largest number of doses in the latest batch is expected to be sent.

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