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Austria to phase out AstraZeneca virus vaccine

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Austria will phase out AstraZeneca from its COVID-19 immunisation programme because of delivery problems and wariness among the population following reports of the vaccine's rare side effects, the health minister said.

Austria becomes the third European country to drop AstraZeneca, after Norway and Denmark ditched the vaccine over rare cases of severe blood clots in people receiving the jab.

"We will probably continue to do first shots with AstraZeneca until early June, and then that's it... AstraZeneca will be discontinued," Health Minister Wolfgang Mueckstein told private TV channel Puls 24 late Monday.

Mueckstein said those who received a first shot of AstraZeneca would still get a second shot of the vaccine, but officials would determine which other vaccine to use for any refresher jabs later.

Mueckstein, a doctor himself, insisted AstraZeneca was "safe" but said Austria had taken the decision to discontinue it because of "bad compliance among the population", "bad press" and "delivery problems".

The European Commission is suing the British-Swedish pharmaceutical group over its failure to deliver millions of doses of its vaccine.

A third of Austria's nine million people has received at least one COVID-19 shot.

The European Medicines Agency and the World Health Organization both recommend continued use of the vaccine, arguing that the benefits far outweigh the associated risks.

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