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Covid-19: 237m vaccine doses to be distributed worldwide over next three months

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The Covax Facility (Covax) has announced where 237 million doses of the Oxford AstraZeneca covid-19 vaccine will be delivered during the first round of its worldwide allocation. It said that the doses were being manufactured by AstraZeneca and by Serum Institute of India (SII AZ) and would be delivered between February and May.

Covax is a multilateral initiative aimed at ensuring that all countries have “fair and equitable access” to covid-19 vaccines. It is co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations; Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance; and the World Health Organization.

Covax announced on 2 March that Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, and India had already received doses of the SII AZ vaccine,¹ and Cote d’Ivoire and Ghana had begun vaccination campaigns on 1 March.

Speaking at a press conference about the initiative on 2 March, the president of Ghana Nana Akufo-Addo said that 600 000 vaccines had arrived in his country on 24 February. To dispel any fears that people might have about the vaccine, he received it on national television. “We believe strongly that mass vaccination holds the key to ensuring that we save as many lives as possible, reduce morbidity and mortality, lessen or prevent ongoing transmission, and return our lives to normal as quickly as possible,” he said. “We have developed an ambitious vaccination rollout plan which aims to vaccinate Ghana’s entire population, with an initial target of 20 million people by the end of 2021.”

Akufo-Addo also said that it was imperative that the African continent developed the capacity to produce covid-19 vaccines. “Domestic production is necessary to facilitate easy and affordable access to vaccines,” he said.

Colombia also received covid-19 vaccines through Covax, making it the first country in the Americas to have done so. The delivery was part of a global pilot programme through which some countries will receive a limited number of doses of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine as part of their total allotted quota of vaccines. The 117 000 doses of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine allocated to Colombia arrived at El Dorado International Airport in Bogota on 2 March.

During an event to announce the arrival of the vaccines in Colombia, President Iván Duque said, “Today marks a very important milestone, today Covax makes its first delivery in the western hemisphere, and the first country to receive it is Colombia.”

Bolivia, El Salvador, and Peru are also expected to receive Pfizer BioNTech vaccines under the same initiative once they have finalised the administrative, legal, and regulatory requirements to move forward with the process.

All countries in Latin America and the Caribbean are expected to begin receiving their first doses of the Oxford vaccine through Covax from March, if all necessary conditions are met. These vaccines are being produced by AstraZeneca-SK Bioscience (Republic of Korea) and Serum Institute of India.

¹ Covax publishes first round of allocations. Gavi. 2 March 2021. www.gavi.org/news/media-room/covax-publishes-first-round-allocations.

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