

Ivory Coast becomes second country to receive vaccines via COVAX

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Abidjan, February 28 (RHC)-- Ivory Coast has become the second country to receive a shipment of COVID-19 vaccines via COVAX, the global vaccine-sharing program.

The vaccines, 504,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine made by the Serum Institute of India, arrived over the weekend in the commercial capital, Abidjan, paving the way for the West African nation to launch a vaccination campaign next week.

Ghana received the first COVAX shipment on Wednesday, marking the start of what the WHO and UNICEF call the largest vaccine procurement and supply operation in history.

By the end of 2021, COVAX plans to deliver nearly two billion doses to more than 90 low and middle-income countries, hoping to level a playing field that has seen wealthier nations vaccinate millions while comparatively few have received shots in poorer parts of the world.

The initiative – led by the World Health Organization, a vaccine group Gavi, and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations – has been hampered by the severely limited global supply of doses as well as logistical problems that have set vaccinations behind globally.

According to WHO Africa, around 24 more countries are expected to start receiving vaccines via COVAX next week. Ivory Coast will begin its vaccination campaign this week. Health Minister Eugene Aka Aouele said the first phase will target health personnel, defence and security forces and teaching staff in Abidjan, where 95 percent of the country's cases have been recorded.

The minister said this first batch will target more than 250,000 people. Ivory Coast has a population of more than 25 million.

"This is an important step in our shared fight against the common enemy that is COVID-19," the minister said. "The pandemic has taken a heavy toll around the world and our country is no exception."

Ivory Coast faces a resurgence of the pandemic that has increased cases and hospitalizations. It has recorded 32,295 cases and 188 deaths since its first case was recorded on March 11 last year, according to Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention figures.

"Today is an important first step towards achieving our shared vision of vaccine equity, but it is only the beginning," said the WHO representative in Ivory Coast, Dr Jean-Marie Vianney Yameogo.

"Global and equitable access to a vaccine, which will protect health workers and those at greatest risk of contracting the disease in particular, is the only way to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on public health and the economy."

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