

# EU begins vaccinations to end COVID 'nightmare'

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EU countries on Sunday embarked on a vaccination campaign to defeat the "nightmare" of COVID-19, with the first to be immunised expressing emotion after their jab and leaders hailing a milestone in the

fight against the pandemic.

The [vaccine](#) is a glimmer of hope for a continent yearning for a return to normal from a pandemic that has killed 1.76 million people worldwide since emerging in China late last year and caused at least 80 million confirmed cases, according to an AFP tally.

But polls have shown many Europeans are unwilling to take the vaccine, which could impede its effectiveness in beating the virus, while it will take months for large chunks of the population to be immunised.

"It is with deep pride and a deep sense of responsibility that I got the vaccine today. A small gesture but a fundamental gesture for all of us," said Claudia Alivernini, 29, an Italian nurse who was the first in her country to receive the Pfizer-BioNTech jab Sunday morning.

In Greece, the first in line was nurse Efstathia Kampissiouli who flashed a V-sign while being vaccinated and later told Ert TV it was "a great honour for me but also for those working on the front line."

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen hailed the campaign start as a "touching moment of unity and a European success story", adding the process will "help to get our normal lives back gradually."

Countries are however showing different strategies, with Italy focusing on [health workers](#), France the elderly and in the Czech Republic, Greece and Slovakia political leaders at the front of the queue.

### **Things 'might actually get worse'**

But the introduction of the vaccine worldwide is far from the end of the crisis. In a bleak assessment, top US government scientist Anthony Fauci warned Sunday that "as we get into the next few weeks, it might actually

get worse".

## Covid-19

World toll Sunday December 27, at 1100 GMT

Deaths	New deaths	Cases	New cases
1,758,026	6,648	80,264,842	472,408

New: 24-hour increase on Saturday December 26

### Hardest-hit countries

	Deaths	New (latest report)	Cases
UNITED STATES	331,916	1,488	18,985,938
BRAZIL	190,795	307	7,465,806
INDIA	147,622	279	10,187,850
MEXICO	122,026	189	1,377,217
ITALY	71,620	261	2,038,759
UNITED KINGDOM	70,405	210	2,256,005
FRANCE	62,573	146	2,550,864
RUSSIA	54,778	552	3,050,248
IRAN	54,693	119	1,200,465
SPAIN	49,824	0	1,854,951
ARGENTINA	42,501	187	1,578,250
COLOMBIA	41,943	253	1,584,903

Increases over 24 hours may not tally exactly with previous day's total due to inavailability or late publication of data or corrections made by authorities

Source: AFP count based on official tolls



Toll of coronavirus infections and deaths worldwide and in worst-affected

countries, as of Dec 27 at 1100 GMT

Israel on Sunday began a nationwide two-week lockdown—its third since the pandemic started—after a sharp rebound in the infection rate.

A new strain of the virus that emerged in Britain has already reached several other European countries as well as Japan, Canada and Jordan and intensified fears of more COVID-19 havoc to come.

The new strain—which experts believe is more contagious—prompted more than 50 countries to impose travel restrictions on the UK.

Echoing concerns from officials across the continent, Health Minister Olivier Veran said France has not ruled out imposing a third nationwide lockdown if [coronavirus](#) cases continue to rise after the holiday season.

He said it would become clear in the next months if the vaccine might not just stop people falling sick but also prevent the virus from being passed on.

"This would allow us to leave this nightmare quicker," he said.

### **'Felt nothing'**

Some EU countries began vaccinating on Saturday, a day before the official start, with a 101-year-old woman in a care home becoming the first person in Germany to be inoculated and Hungary and Slovakia also handing out their first shots.

Araceli Rosario Hidalgo Sanchez, a 96-year-old living in a care home in central Spain became the first person in the country to be vaccinated on

Sunday, in an event broadcast by national television. She said smilingly she felt "nothing" from the shot.



An employee opens an ultra-low-temperature freezer where Covid-19 vaccines will be stored in the Spanish Basque city of Hernani

France began its campaign in care homes for the elderly in the Paris suburb of Seine-Saint-Denis, a low-income area hard hit by COVID-19, with a 78-year-old woman named Mauricette the first to receive the jab to applause from staff.

"We have a new weapon against the virus—the vaccine," tweeted

President Emmanuel Macron.

But a poll published in the Journal du Dimanche saying 56 percent of French people do not plan to take the jab.

Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven described the vaccine as a "ray of light in the darkness". One of the first Swedes to get the vaccine, Stig Larsson, 89, said he "did not hesitate" about being inoculated.

### **'Winning formula'**

Britain, China, Russia, Canada, the United States, Switzerland, Serbia, Singapore and Saudi Arabia have already begun their vaccination campaigns.

Vaccines other than the Pfizer-BioNTech jab are also in the pipeline, and the United States, where over a million people have already been vaccinated, last week began jabs with the vaccine developed by US biotech firm Moderna.

Meanwhile the University of Oxford and drug manufacturer AstraZeneca have applied to the UK authorities for permission to roll out their COVID-19 vaccine, which chief executive Pascal Soriot described as a "winning formula".

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