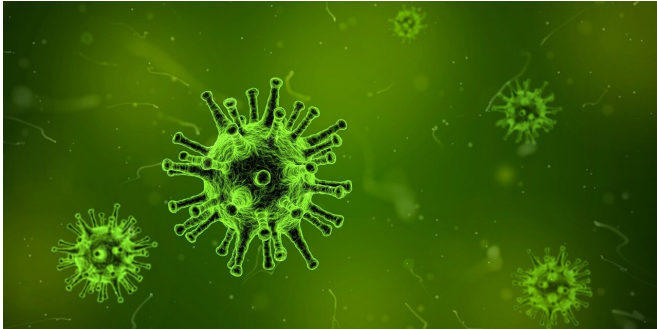


Hungary first EU member to license Russian virus jab

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Hungary on Thursday became the first European Union member to grant preliminary approval for Russia's Sputnik V coronavirus jab, also licensing the AstraZeneca vaccine while blasting the bloc's "exceptionally slow" vaccination tempo.

"The Hungarian pharmaceutical authority has granted a temporary licence for the vaccines produced by AstraZeneca and Sputnik," Gergely Gulyas, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's cabinet chief, told a press briefing.

According to regulations from the EU's Amsterdam-based European Medicines Agency (EMA), a national regulator may grant a temporary licence for a vaccine in an emergency situation.

Gulyas said the approval by Hungarian doctors who had been in Moscow for weeks inspecting Sputnik V clears the path for Budapest to finalise an order, with Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto travelling to Moscow on Thursday.

The Sputnik doses still need a final sign-off from a Hungarian public health authority, so it is unknown when the first jabs would actually be administered.

Gulyas said Hungary, with a population of 9.8

million, had received around 330,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna drugs since December.

"The EMA is unfortunately exceptionally slow," said Gulyas, defending Budapest's latest go-it-alone stance against the EU.

"The UK approved (AstraZeneca) earlier and are already vaccinating with it, but we can't use AstraZeneca yet as the EMA has not yet approved it," he said.

AstraZeneca and Oxford University have applied for authorisation for their [coronavirus vaccine](#) in the EU with a decision possible by January 29, the EMA said last week.

The jab would be the third available for the 27-nation EU after the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna drugs, as the bloc struggles to speed up the rollout.

Russia in August registered Sputnik V—named after the Soviet-era satellite—months ahead of Western competitors but before the start of large-scale clinical trials, which left some experts wary.

Its developers have since said that the jab is more than 90 percent effective and Russia launched its mass vaccination campaign using the shot this week.

According to Russian authorities Sputnik has already been registered in a number of countries including Serbia, Belarus, Venezuela, Bolivia and Algeria.

"The government wants to purchase only such vaccines which have already been administered to millions of people, and—naturally—only the vaccines which have been officially vetted and authorised as safe and effective can be used for inoculation in Hungary," Gulyas said.

Hungary has also "effectively agreed to receive one million vaccines immediately" of the Chinese-made Sinopharm jab, pending approval by Hungarian inspectors currently in Beijing, Gulyas said.

"We hope that vaccines will be available in Hungary from as many places and in as large quantities as possible," he said.

On Thursday, Hungary reported 98 new deaths from COVID-19, bringing the country's overall death toll to over 11,700.

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