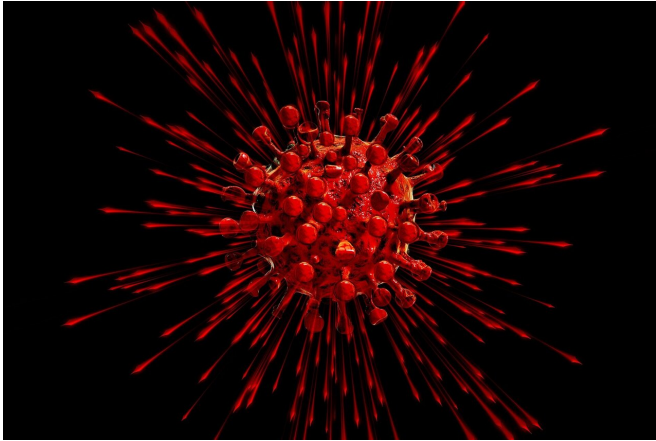


Belgium, like other EU states, limits AstraZeneca jab

3 February 2021



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Belgium has joined a growing list of EU countries that are restricting use of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 jab to younger age brackets because of question marks regarding older groups.

The vaccine, for the moment, will be limited to adults under age 55 following a recommendation from the country's health regulator, Health Minister Frank Vandenbroucke told Belgian television on Tuesday.

That went in the same direction as official health recommendations made in Germany, France, Austria and Sweden limiting it to under-65s, and in Poland for under-60s.

Switzerland, a non-EU member, on Wednesday said it was not authorising the AstraZeneca vaccine at all as data was "not yet sufficient".

Those EU countries' assessments were more restrictive than the authorisation given by the European Medicines Agency that the AstraZeneca jab is suitable for all adult ages.

The EMA put the vaccine's efficacy at 60 percent, based on clinical and other data supplied by AstraZeneca, which has admitted that its information on [older patients](#) was scarce relative to other authorised vaccines.

Britain has been depending largely on the AstraZeneca vaccine for an early and Europe-leading first-jab rollout, and is putting it into the arms of the elderly and frontline healthworkers as a priority.

The EU had been counting on the vaccine too for the first few months of this year, but was let down when the company failed to supply the more than 100 million doses it was meant to deliver.

EU officials said only around a quarter of the doses would be provided.

Jabs for 3.2%

Belgium, a country of 11.5 million people, has ordered 7.7 million doses of the AstraZeneca [vaccine](#).

Since vaccinations started five weeks ago it has given a first jab to 300,000 people—mostly care-home residents and workers—representing 3.22 percent of the population. Around 30,000 people have had their second jab.

An inspection of an AstraZeneca plant in Belgium conducted last week was focused on finding out whether doses produced there and meant for the EU ended up being exported to Britain instead.

The European Union has so far authorised two other vaccines: the ones from BioNTech/Pfizer and from Moderna, both of which have data showing efficacy of over 90 percent.

Belgium has suffered more than most countries during the pandemic, with more than 21,000

deaths, one of the worst death ratios in the world.

But in the [second wave](#) currently sweeping Europe, the country has reined in virus infections and deaths relatively better than neighbouring countries thanks to nearly four months of a nighttime curfew, the closure of bars and restaurants, and a work-from-home order.

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