

Shortages stymie Brazil vaccination drive

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Hard-hit Brazil's drive to vaccinate its population against COVID-19 has stumbled this week as a lack of doses forced authorities to slow or halt immunization in several key areas.

Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo state and the northeastern city of Salvador have all run into vaccine shortages, fueling frustration with the government, which already faced criticism for President Jair Bolsonaro's erratic handling of the pandemic.

Brazil got its immunization campaign off to a relatively late start—mid-January—and is now struggling to secure enough vaccine less than a month later.

Rio, Brazil's second most populous city and the one with the highest death toll from the virus—nearly 20,000—said it had only enough vaccine to last until Saturday.

"The city is counting on a new delivery from next week. If it does not arrive, the (vaccination) schedule will be interrupted," city hall said in a statement.

Two cities in Rio's greater metropolitan area, Niteroi and Sao Goncalo, had to suspend vaccination for several days this week because of shortages.

The same happened in Salvador, a [city](#) of nearly three million people and the fourth-largest in Brazil.

It halted vaccination for [health professionals](#) and delayed the start date—originally set for this week—for vaccinating residents aged 80 to 84.

Sao Paulo state, the country's industrial hub, also had to postpone vaccination for that age group, until March 1.

"There's no vaccine right now," state Health Secretary Jean Gorinchteyn said Friday.

More than 236,000 people have died of COVID-19 in Brazil, the second-highest death toll worldwide after the United States.

The country has so far obtained around 12 million doses of the vaccines developed by Chinese firm Sinovac and British-Swedish firm AstraZeneca.

Both are two-dose vaccines. More than 4.5 million people in Brazil have received a first dose.

The government says it has deals for a total of 100 million doses of the Sinovac vaccine by the end of August and 210.4 million doses of the AstraZeneca [vaccine](#) by the end of the year, with the next deliveries expected in February and March, respectively.

Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello said Thursday he was confident Brazil could vaccinate the entire population of 212 million people by the end of the year.

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