

China to issue visas to foreigners who have taken Chinese jab

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China is poised to ease border restrictions to allow some foreigners—including from the US, India and Australia—back in, provided they have taken a Chinese-made COVID-19 vaccine.

The country has been closed to most foreigners since last March to stem the spread of the coronavirus, which it has largely brought under control at home, leaving many with jobs and family inside China stranded overseas.

But Chinese embassies in several countries have issued notices saying the country will open visa applications to select people who have taken a China-made jab.

The Chinese Embassy in the United States said in a statement dated Monday that it would begin to process "visa applicants inoculated with Chinese COVID-19 vaccines".

This would apply from this week to those visiting the Chinese mainland for work resumption,

business travel, or for "humanitarian needs", such as reuniting with family members.

Beijing is driving forward its inoculation plan for its vast domestic population with four domestically produced vaccines approved so far.

But it has yet to approve any foreign-made jabs.

The embassy statement said the new rule applied to those who had either had two doses of the vaccine or a single-dose at least 14 days before applying for the visa.

Chinese embassies in other countries including Australia, India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Italy and Sri Lanka have published similar statements.

Those arriving in China will still have to face a gruelling quarantine of up to three weeks.

China's vaccines have been rolled out in several countries around the world, including Turkey, Indonesia and Cambodia.

The Philippines received 600,000 vaccine doses from China two weeks ago, kickstarting its inoculation drive.

But they are not readily available everywhere, including in India or Sri Lanka.

Beijing has struggled to gain international trust for its vaccine candidates, hindered by a lack of transparency on test results.

But Chinese companies are still set to export nearly 400 million doses of home-grown vaccines overseas, state media has reported.

Beijing did not comment when asked at a press briefing Tuesday whether it would be better to use WHO-recognised vaccines, since many countries are not administering the Chinese shot.

"China is making its own facilitation arrangements for those who have taken Chinese vaccines," said foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian.

The move is based on "full consideration of safety and effectiveness of the vaccines", and it is a "meaningful attempt to facilitate cross-border travels," he told reporters.

"It has nothing to do with the issue of China approving vaccines."

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