

EU moves toward stricter export controls for COVID vaccines

24 March 2021, by Raf Casert



A health worker holds a dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, during a mass vaccination campaign at Sn Pedro Hospital, in Logrono, northern Spain, Wednesday, March 24, 2021. Spain resumed the use of the AstraZeneca vaccine on Wednesday. (AP Photo/Alvaro Barrientos)

The European Union moved Wednesday toward imposing stricter export controls for coronavirus vaccines, seeking to make sure there are more COVID-19 shots to boost the bloc's flagging vaccine campaign as new infections surge.

The EU's executive body said on the eve of a summit of the EU's 27 leaders that it has a plan to guarantee that more vaccines produced in the bloc are available for its own citizens even if it comes at the cost of helping nations outside the bloc.

The EU move is expected to be a blow to Britain, whose speedy vaccination rollout has been eyed with envy by many EU nations, especially since it came as the U.K. formally completed its Brexit divorce from the bloc. The latest figures show that 45% of British adults have had at least one [vaccine](#) shot, compared to less than 14% for the bloc.

The EU Commission said it would proceed on a case-by-case basis but attention centered on the U.K. and the Anglo-Swedish company AstraZeneca, which has two vaccine factories in EU territory.

"I mention specifically the U.K.," said EU Commission Vice President Valdis Dombrovskis. Since the end of January, "some 10 million doses have been exported from the EU to the U.K. and zero doses have been exported from U.K. to the EU."

"So it's clear that we also need to look at those aspects of reciprocity and proportionality," he said.



European Council President Charles Michel, second left, talks to Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, right on a screen, during a video conference ahead of a EU summit at the European Council headquarters in Brussels, Wednesday, March 24, 2021. (Stephanie Lecocq, Photo Pool via AP)

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said the EU has approved the export of 41 million vaccine doses to 33 countries in the last six weeks and believes that it stands at the forefront of

international vaccine-sharing efforts.

Under a less stringent export control system in force so far, only one vaccine shipment in 381 has been barred. That was supposed to be sent to Australia, which has a very limited coronavirus outbreak compared to the third surge of infections that many EU nations are now facing. World Health Organization officials say new infections are rising across Europe after previously declining for six weeks.

"We have secured more than enough doses for the entire population. But we have to ensure timely and sufficient vaccine deliveries to EU citizens," von der Leyen said. "Every day counts."

The EU has been feuding with AstraZeneca for months in a dispute over exactly how many vaccine doses would be delivered by certain dates. Several vaccine producers, including Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca, were hit by production delays over the winter, just as worldwide demands for [coronavirus](#) vaccines soared.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has sought to ease the tensions over vaccines, speaking by phone in the past few days to European leaders including von der Leyen and French President Emmanuel Macron.

the AstraZeneca vaccine on Wednesday. (AP Photo/Alvaro Barrientos)

"We're all fighting the same pandemic across the whole of the European continent," Johnson told a news conference on Tuesday evening. "Vaccines are an international operation," he said, adding that the U.K. would "continue to work with European partners to deliver the vaccine rollout."

"We in this country don't believe in blockades of any kind of vaccines or vaccine materials," he said.

Still, the EU has been insisting that two AstraZeneca plants in Britain should also be considered part of the EU vaccine deliveries.

© 2021 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed without permission.



Javier Crespo receives a dose of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine, during a mass vaccination campaign at Sn Pedro Hospital, in Logrono, northern Spain, Wednesday, March 24, 2021. Spain resumed the use of

APA citation: EU moves toward stricter export controls for COVID vaccines (2021, March 24) retrieved 25 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-03-eu-stricter-export-covid-vaccines.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.