

EU poised to secure 1.8 bn 2nd-generation vaccine doses

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The EU is about to start negotiations with a single pharmaceutical company to secure up to 1.8 billion doses of a "second generation" mRNA vaccine to combat future variants, a European Commission

source said.

The upcoming deal aims to have deliveries made on a monthly schedule starting late this year and going into 2023, the source told AFP.

It is part of the commission's preparedness plan to handle "the next stages" of the pandemic as the [coronavirus](#) continues to mutate, said the source, who is familiar with the approach taken by commission chief Ursula von der Leyen.

The source would not say which "sole supplier" would be tapped, but did not demur asked if it was BioNTech/Pfizer, which has already agreed to bring forward deliveries to the EU of its first-generation mRNA [vaccine](#).

"We want a big volume" of doses, "we want a firm contract for 900 million doses and an option for the same again", the source said, confirming information first reported by the German newspaper Die Welt.

The extra doses would greatly increase the EU's access to vaccines to fight the coronavirus pandemic by going beyond the 2.6 billion doses of various "first-generation" vaccines already secured for this year and next.

They would address growing concerns globally that the current vaccines deployed can have their effects dampened by some variants, as appears to already be the case with strains first detected in South Africa and Brazil.

"There will be a delivery obligation" for the extra doses, the source emphasised.

That implicitly pointed to problems the commission has had with

AstraZeneca, which has come up short in delivering contracted doses of its vaccine—an adenovirus vaccine different from the mRNA types produced by BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna.

'Priority for Europe'

The next-generation mRNA vaccine the commission is looking to buy "has to cover all the variants that could emerge"—and "with a production within Europe and a priority for Europe", the source said.

The new contract to be worked out would fix the problems that came to light with the contracts for the first lot of vaccines, "based on the experience of the past eight months," the source said, again implicitly raising the row that has festered with AstraZeneca.

The total population of the European Union is 450 million. The commission's goal is to have 70 percent of the [adult population](#) fully inoculated with current vaccines by the middle of September.

According to data collated by AFP from official health sources, nearly 90 million jabs have so far been given in the EU, covering 14.4 percent of the total population. At least 5.8 percent of the population have received two jabs.

The 27-nation bloc has trailed the US, Israel and Britain in its vaccination rollout, mainly because of supply constraints in the first three months of this year. Jabs have greatly accelerated since with boosted deliveries, particularly of BioNTech/Pfizer doses.

Several EU countries have restricted the use of AstraZeneca jabs to the older segments of the population because of increased concerns—crystallised by the EU drug regulator—that they are linked to a very rare form of potentially fatal blood clotting affecting the brain.

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