

Elderly, risk groups to go first when Germany rolls out vaccine

9 November 2020



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Germany said Monday it will give priority for a future vaccine to the elderly, health workers and others at greater risk for the novel coronavirus, with plans for dozens of vaccination centres nationwide.

"It is important that we protect those who are at highest risk first," health minister Jens Spahn told journalists after a cabinet meeting on Germany's vaccination strategy.

Some 40 percent of the fast-ageing country's population of around 80 million people is deemed to be in the risk group.

Besides the elderly and chronically ill, those with the highest exposure potential to the virus such as [healthcare workers](#) and carers would also be given priority, he said.

Spahn's statement came as hopes rose for a vaccine in coming weeks, as homegrown company BioNTech and US giant Pfizer announced that Phase 3 trials have proven their vaccine is 90 percent effective in preventing COVID-19 infections.

According to preliminary findings, protection in patients from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds was achieved seven days after the second of two vaccine doses, and 28 days after the first.

The companies said they expect to supply up to 50 million [vaccine doses](#) globally in 2020, and up to 1.3 billion in 2021.

While welcoming the BioNTech-Pfizer news, Spahn noted there would not be enough vaccines for everyone immediately.

He said regional authorities will ramp up their preparations for establishing around 60 vaccination centres, with mobile units to support efforts in giving the population the jab—which he stressed would not be compulsory.

Earlier, government advisors, the Leopoldina Academy, the Stiko [vaccine](#) commission, Germany's Ethics Council and disease control agency RKI had also made a case for some to be given doses before others.

"We will need prioritisation. We need to do it in such a way that on the basis of best available evidence, we achieve the best benefit for the whole population," said Thomas Mertens, who chairs Stiko.

Germany this month re-imposed tough measures to help slow the COVID-19 outbreak, with schools, daycare centres and shops staying open while restaurants, bars, leisure and cultural centres having to close.

Chancellor Angela Merkel warned Sunday that extraordinary curbs such as mask wearing or social distancing may be in place for months to come yet.

Only when 60 to 70 percent of the population has achieved immunity—either through vaccination or having caught the virus—can COVID-19 be deemed

to have been "more or less overcome," she said.

"Then we can also lift all restrictions," Merkel said.

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APA citation: Elderly, risk groups to go first when Germany rolls out vaccine (2020, November 9)
retrieved 4 June 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-11-elderly-groups-germany-vaccine.html>

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