

UK, France regulators approve Moderna COVID vaccine

8 January 2021



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Britain on Friday approved a third COVID vaccine for its mass inoculation drive, as regulators gave the green light to a jab developed by US firm Moderna.

Some 1.5 million people have been given doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines since early December, and the government is aiming to have 15 million inoculated by mid-February.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the approval of the Moderna jab by the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) was another shot in the arm for the programme.

"This is further great news and another weapon in our arsenal to tame this awful disease," he said.

"Moderna's [vaccine](#) will allow us to accelerate our [vaccination programme](#) even further once doses become available from the spring."

The MHRA was the first regulator in the world to

approve the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca jabs, allowing the start of what health chiefs said is Britain's biggest-ever vaccination drive.

Hancock's department said the Moderna jab "meets the regulator's strict standards of safety, efficacy and quality".

England's deputy chief medical officer, Jonathan Van-Tam, called the vaccine "highly effective" and said it was "another impressive success for science".

The Department of Health and Social Care said it was 94 percent effective in preventing disease, including in the elderly.

Britain has ordered 17 million doses of the vaccine, which will be delivered in the coming months once Moderna increases production capacity, it added.

Elderly residents and staff at [care homes](#), the over-70s and the clinically extremely vulnerable are first in line for the jabs, and the government has stepped up the programme to meet its February target.

More than 1,000 new vaccination sites, including in community pharmacies and even supermarket car parks, are expected to be open by the end of this week.

Army logistics specialists have been drafted in to help with supply and deliveries.

Britain has secured early access to 367 million doses of seven of the most promising vaccine candidates.

The Moderna announcement comes with much of Britain under a renewed lockdown to try to cut spiralling infection rates and deaths blamed on a fast-spreading variant of the virus.

A total of 1,162 new deaths within 28 days of a positive test were recorded on Thursday—the highest since the first-wave peak in April last year.

Overall, some 2.9 million people have been infected.

Stay-at-home restrictions, which include school closures, are expected to last until at least mid-February.

Green light in France

France's national health authority also said Friday that it had approved Moderna's vaccine for people 18 and older, following EU approval for the Moderna vaccine on Wednesday.

The decision clears the way for a second option in an inoculation campaign that has been assailed by critics as lagging far behind those of its neighbours.

It added that the Moderna shot could also be used for people over 75, since data so far suggest an 86 percent effective rate for the elderly, compared with 94 percent efficiency for younger adults.

The government's "vaccine czar," Alain Fischer, told BFM radio that the first deliveries of the Moderna shots "should occur in the coming days, or the second half of January at the latest".

Authorities reported 21,703 new daily cases and 277 deaths on Thursday, bringing the French death toll to 66,841.

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APA citation: UK, France regulators approve Moderna COVID vaccine (2021, January 8) retrieved 10 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-01-uk-france-moderna-covid-vaccine.html>

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