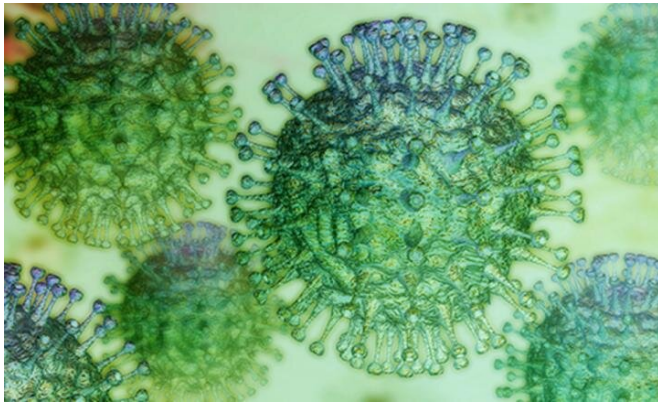


Brazil starts vaccination campaign two days early

18 January 2021



Coronavirus. Credit: European Centers for Disease Control

Authorities in Brazil, hard-hit by the coronavirus pandemic, will roll out a nationwide vaccination campaign Monday, two days earlier than announced.

The accelerated push comes amid a surge in COVID-19 cases and mounting impatience in states including Sao Paulo, which has already launched its own inoculation drive.

Brazil's Anvisa regulatory agency on Sunday approved the Chinese CoronaVac jab as well as AstraZeneca and Oxford University's Covishield.

A devastating second wave of coronavirus has been killing more than 1,000 people a day in the vast South American nation. Overall, nearly 210,000 people have died there.

Sao Paulo Governor Joao Doria attended a ceremony Sunday shortly after the Anvisa announcement, where Monica Calazans, a 54-year-old nurse, became the first person to receive a COVID-19 jab in Brazil.

Millions of doses shipped

"After hearing from the governors, we came to the conclusion that today we will distribute the vaccines to the states," and they "can begin to vaccinate" immediately, Health Minister Eduardo Pazuello said Monday.

He made the announcement after meeting state leaders at Guarulhos airport in Sao Paulo, from where 4.5 million doses of China's CoronaVac vaccine will be sent nationwide.

Health workers, people older than 75, residents of old age homes and [indigenous populations](#) will be the first to be vaccinated. Both the CoronaVac and the Covishield require two doses.

Rio de Janeiro, the hardest-hit state in the country, is expected to start doling out jabs from 5:00 pm local time (2000 GMT) in an area near the Christ the Redeemer statue that dominates the city.

Northern Amazonas state, which has been battling record deaths and burials as hospitals run out of beds and life-saving oxygen, should receive its first batch of vaccines late Monday and will start inoculating people on Tuesday morning, the government said.

Pazuello had initially said the government would start distributing vaccines to all 27 states on Monday for a national inoculation campaign to start Wednesday.

While many countries have already started vaccination drives, including some among its neighbors, Brazil, with its population of some 213 million, has lagged behind.

And CoronaVac has been dragged into a political standoff between far-right President Jair Bolsonaro, who has repeatedly tried to discredit it, and Sao Paulo Governor Doria, a defender.

Bolsonaro, who has downplayed the virus and railed against lockdowns, [face masks](#) and other "hysteria," has come under renewed fire for his handling of the epidemic.

Sao Paulo already has six million doses of the CoronaVac vaccine, which a Brazilian trial had found to be 50 percent effective in preventing [coronavirus](#) infection, and the health ministry announced this month it had signed a deal with the local Butantan Institute in Sao Paulo, a major [vaccine](#) maker, to produce 100 million more.

Last week, Bolsonaro announced a commercial plane would be sent to India to collect two million doses of Covishield, produced there by the Serum Institute.

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