

SA puts brakes on Covid-19 vaccine delivery

By [Promit Mukherjee](#)

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South Africa has given the red light to the delivery of Johnson & Johnson and Pfizer vaccines. The health ministry cites too much stock as a reason as vaccine hesitancy slows an inoculation campaign.



Source: Reuters/Sumaya Hisham

About 35% of South Africans are fully vaccinated: higher than in most other African nations, but the figure is half the government's year-end target. It has averaged 106,000 doses a day in the past 15 days in a nation of 60 million people.

Innoculation demand high

Earlier this year, the programme was slowed by insufficient doses. Now deliveries have been delayed due to oversupply, making the country an outlier in the continent where most are still starved of vaccines.

Nicholas Crisp, deputy director-general of the Health Department, said that South Africa had 16.8 million doses in stock and that deliveries had been deferred.

"We have 158 days' stock in the country at current use," a spokesman for the Health Ministry said. "We have deferred some deliveries."

They did not say when deliveries would now take place.

Vaccines to be re-routed

Stavros Nicolaou, chief executive of Aspen Pharmacare, which is packaging 25 million doses a month of J&J vaccines in South Africa, said most of the vaccines bound for South Africa would now go to the rest of the continent.

Nicolaou, who is also chairman of public health at Business for South Africa (B4SA), said deliveries would likely be deferred until the first quarter of next year.

Vaccines packaged at Aspen's plant are part of the African Union's agreement to buy 220 million doses from J&J.

Key players unresponsive

The African Union and J&J did not respond to an email seeking comment.

A Pfizer spokesperson said: "We remain adaptable to individual country's vaccine requirements whilst continuing to meet our quarterly commitments as per the South Africa supply agreement."

South Africa's government has been seeking to boost the rate of daily administered doses.

"There is a fair amount of apathy and hesitancy," said Shabir Madhi, who led the clinical study for the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine in South Africa.

To ramp up vaccinations, the government has launched pop-up vaccination centres and sought help from community leaders. It has also opened inoculations to children aged 12 to 17.

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