

Sudan becomes first country in the Middle East and North Africa to receive vaccines via the COVAX Facility

Initial doses to health care workers and people above 45 with chronic medical conditions



KHARTOUM, 3 March 2021 – Sudan is the first country in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to receive vaccines against COVID-19 following the arrival of over 800 000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine at the Khartoum International Airport. The vaccines were delivered with UNICEF’s support through COVAX, a coalition co-led by the World Health Organization (WHO), Gavi, the Vaccines Alliance and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), that ensures equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines to countries regardless of their income.

The delivery follows the arrival of 4.5 metric tons of syringes and safety boxes, part of a Gavi-funded and supported global stockpile, that UNICEF delivered on behalf of the COVAX Facility last Friday, 26 February 2021, critical for safe and effective vaccination. WHO has worked with national authorities to put a vaccination strategy in place that includes training vaccinators, ensuring vaccine safety, and surveillance for adverse effects.

The initial consignment of vaccines received today will support the vaccination of health care workers and people above 45 with chronic medical conditions, living in areas with high transmission or anticipated high transmission, marking the first phase of the nationwide vaccination campaign.

By vaccinating Sudan's health care workers first, they can continue to provide life-saving services and maintain a functional health care system. It is critical that health care workers who protect the lives of others are protected first.

Dr Omer Mohamed Elnagieb, Sudan's Minister of Health, expressed appreciation of all partners who worked together for Sudan to become the first country across the region to receive vaccines against COVID-19 through the COVAX Facility.

"The vaccines are a critical part of controlling the spread of the virus in Sudan and eventually return to normalcy," said Dr Omer Mohamed Elnagieb. He urged those eligible to register and get vaccinated as soon as they get an appointment.

Globally and in Sudan, COVID-19 has disrupted delivery of essential services and continues to claim lives and disrupt livelihoods. As of 1 March 2021, Sudan had over 28 505 confirmed COVID-19 cases and 1892 associated deaths, since the first COVID-19 positive case was announced on 13 March 2020.

"This is great news. Through the COVAX Facility, Gavi ensures that all countries have an equal opportunity to access these life-saving vaccines. We continue to work towards leaving no one behind with immunization," said Jamilya Sherova, Senior Country Manager for Sudan at Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

“Our hope in recovery from the pandemic is through the vaccines,” Abdullah Fadil, Representative of UNICEF Sudan, affirmed. “Vaccines have reduced the scourge of numerous infectious diseases, saved millions of lives and have effectively eliminated many life-threatening diseases,” he continued.

Dr Nima Saeed Abid, WHO Representative in Sudan, confirmed that the vaccines received today are safe and have been approved through WHO’s Emergency Use Listing Procedure for use in Sudan and other countries. He applauded the Government of Sudan, the Federal Ministry of Health and partners for the great milestone that will ensure the people of Sudan are protected from the deadly disease that continues to spread.

“The World Health Organization is pleased to be part of this milestone for the COVID-19 response in Sudan. Vaccines work and vaccines should be for all,” stressed Dr Nima. “But we should always remember that vaccinations only work as part of a comprehensive approach – they are only one tool in our arsenal against the virus and are most effective when combined with all other public health and personal prevention strategies.”

With Gavi support, UNICEF and WHO will support the Government of Sudan to roll out the vaccine campaign and organize nationwide vaccination drives to reach all eligible persons with vaccines.

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Notes to editors:

COVAX is working to ensure that all countries participating in the Facility (currently 190 including Sudan) have equitable access to at least 2 billion doses of the COVID-19 vaccine by the end of 2021. The additional consignments of the vaccines for Sudan are expected to arrive in the second quarter of 2021.

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