

Belgium looks to launch limited vaccine campaign in January

3 December 2020



In this undated photo released by Pfizer on Tuesday, Dec. 1, 2020, a vial of the COVID-19 candidate vaccine developed by BioNTech and Pfizer is shown displayed at the headquarters in Puurs, Belgium. The vaccine is awaiting approval to use against the coronavirus. (Pfizer via AP)

Belgium plans to launch a COVID-19 vaccination campaign on a limited scale starting in early January and initially will use the shots developed by Pfizer and BioNtech, health authorities said Thursday.

The small country with some 11.5 million inhabitants has been severely hit by the

[coronavirus](#), reporting more than 580,000 cases and nearly 17,000 virus-related deaths since the start of the pandemic.

Belgium's health ministers said the national immunization strategy will be rolled out in phases, depending on the number of doses available. During the first phase, 600,000 doses of the Pfizer/BioNtech vaccine will be used, enough for 300,000 people since each person needs two shots.

European regulators are likely to authorize the first COVID-19 vaccines by the end of December or early January, and Belgium wants to start giving them to people soon after. Both BioNTech/Pfizer and Moderna submitted conditional marketing authorization applications to the European Medicines Agency this week.

In Belgium, residents and staff of care centers for [elderly people](#) will get priority access to vaccines along with frontline health care workers. Other people over age 65 or at high risk for the virus will be vaccinated at a later stage, when vaccines that can be stocked under less stringent refrigeration standards are available. The [general population](#) considered to be at low risk will have to wait longer.

"It means that we won't have a majority of citizens vaccinated before the summer," said Dirk Ramaekers, who heads the country's vaccination task force.

The European Union's executive commission has secured deals with Moderna, AstraZeneca, Sanofi-GSK, Janssen Pharmaceutica NV, BioNtech-Pfizer and CureVac to allow EU member nations to purchase up to 2 billion vaccine doses. The commission said once a [vaccine](#) is authorized, members should get access to it at the same time, on a pro rata basis,

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