



Next Africa

Next Africa: Falling Behind in the Race For Covid-19 Vaccines

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Welcome to Next Africa, a weekly newsletter of where the continent stands now – and where it's going next.

As countries around the world start to inoculate their populations from the coronavirus, Africa is being left behind.

Many nations on the continent are too poor to have pre-ordered

vaccines from pharmaceutical companies, while others have been accused of being too disorganized. Almost all are dependent on Covax, a global initiative to ensure equitable access to doses. That may take months to deliver and is unlikely to cater for everyone.

With pressure growing on African governments, many are making promises that are hard to keep.



Medical workers wait for passengers inside a mobile coronavirus testing unit amid the wait for vaccines. *Photographer: Guillem Sartorio/Bloomberg*

Nigerian officials say vaccines will arrive as early as this month, despite regulators stating previously they would only approve a version in April. Kenya claims to have ordered 24 million doses, according to local reports, while eSwatini says it will begin vaccinating its more than 1.1 million people in the first quarter. Yet Covax at best aims to provide shots for 20% of the populations of its 92 member nations in 2021.

A rare success is the Seychelles, a tiny island archipelago, which will begin vaccinating its population with 50,000 doses from China on Sunday.

In the case of South Africa, a nation with a sophisticated medical industry that's hosting four Covid-19 vaccine trials, a storm of criticism over the government's inaction has spurred it into action.

After initially failing to secure any direct supply deals with drugmakers, Health Minister Zweli Mkhize said this week 1.5 million of AstraZeneca's doses will arrive from India by the end of February. A charity had to pay South Africa's Covax deposit and private medical insurers say they will fund shots for 30% of citizens likely to need vaccinations.

Africa's scramble for vaccines says a lot about global inequality. It also poses questions about the competence of governments when the health of their people is on the line.

News & Opinion

Trade Deal | The first goods have begun to flow under an Africa-wide free-trade pact, the culmination of more than five years of negotiations. The treaty seeks to lower or eliminate cross-border tariffs on most goods, facilitate the movement of capital and people, promote investment and pave the way for a continent-wide customs union. The bloc has a potential market of 1.2 billion people and could be the world's biggest free-trade zone by area when fully operational.

Lockdown Debates | Zimbabwe's government kicked off a 30-day hard lockdown to curb coronavirus infections, while South African officials spent part of the week debating how to respond to fresh records in daily Covid-19 case numbers. At least two prominent ministers argued for measures to be toughened to levels last seen in April, although others warned the economic damage would be dire. A fresh ban on alcohol sales to help out the hospitals and discourage gatherings drew legal action from SAB Breweries, the country's biggest beer maker.