

Covid-19 vaccines

EU offers free Covid-19 vaccines to China to help curb outbreak

Beijing rejects Brussels' offer, citing full control of situation



An elderly woman receives a Covid-19 vaccine in Danzhai in China's southwestern Guizhou province © AFP/Getty Images

Andy Bounds in Brussels 3 HOURS AGO

The EU has offered free Covid-19 vaccines to China to help Beijing contain a mass outbreak of the illness, an offer promptly rejected by the Chinese government.

The offer was made in recent days ahead of a meeting of EU health ministry officials, said a spokesman for the European Commission on Tuesday. The initiative is part of efforts by health commissioner Stella Kyriakides to arrange a European response to the prospect of a wave of infections after Beijing ditched its so-called “zero Covid” policy.

“Commissioner Kyriakides has reached out to her Chinese counterparts to offer solidarity and support, and this includes public health expertise as well as through variant-adapted EU vaccine donations,” said the commission spokesman.

China’s foreign ministry on Tuesday said the country did not need European vaccines, citing the “strengthening clinical efficacy” of its “ample” domestic jabs.

“The situation of China’s epidemic prevention and control is on its predicted path and under control,” said foreign ministry spokesperson Mao Ning.

China has relied on its domestically produced Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines and has yet to deploy western vaccines using mRNA technology at large scale. The [World](#)

[Health Organization](#) on December 21 said China's current vaccination coverage was insufficient.

Its domestic vaccines require three doses to prevent severe illness in vulnerable people.

Two doses only provided 50 per cent protection for people over 60, Dr Mike Ryan, WHO head of health emergencies, told a press conference.

“That’s just not adequate protection in a population as large as the population of China. In such a large population, with so many people in a vulnerable setting, with that coverage, we really have to focus on vaccination.”

Only 40 per cent of over-80s have had three doses, according to WHO data.

By contrast, in the EU, 83 per cent of the adult population is fully vaccinated and more than 1.7bn doses have been delivered. Contracts have been concluded with eight vaccine developers, providing as many as 4.2bn doses.

However, EU member states have surplus stocks due to large orders of vaccines under long-term contracts with manufacturers. These could be shipped to China, the EU officials said.

Kyriakides is seeking a meeting with pharmaceutical companies to adjust the contracts within the next few weeks after complaints from member states that they are spending money on [drugs that are destroyed](#).

Meanwhile, some EU countries have insisted that travellers arriving from China after January 8, when restrictions are lifted, must provide evidence of a negative Covid test or of their vaccination status.

France, Spain and Italy have all said they would [bring in controls](#) as they fear the spread of as yet unidentified new variants. However, Kyriakides has called for co-ordinated action. Member state officials last week opted not to call for China-specific measures since coronavirus is now endemic in the EU. They meet again on Tuesday and there is a meeting of the Integrated Political Crisis Response emergency mechanism on Wednesday.

[China's mission to the EU](#) insisted on Sunday that the country had good vaccination coverage. “More than 3.4bn Covid-19 vaccine doses have been administered on the Chinese mainland, with over 90 per cent of the population fully vaccinated and over 92 per cent of the population received at least one dose,” it said.

It said Chinese tourists did not pose any threat, pointing out that the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control considered Covid-19 screenings and other measures on travellers from China “unjustified”.

“Tourist destinations across the world can’t wait to welcome Chinese tourists as cross-border travel searches soar in China,” China’s mission to the EU added.

Additional reporting by Ryan McMorrow in Beijing

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