



Office of the Prime Minister

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## **COVID-19 VACCINES SHIPPED BY COVAX ARRIVE IN FIJI**

Suva - Fiji became the first country in the Pacific islands to receive COVID-19 vaccine doses shipped via the COVAX Facility, a partnership between CEPI, Gavi, UNICEF and WHO. This is a historic step towards achieving the goal to ensure equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines globally, in what will be the largest vaccine procurement and supply operation in history.

The arrival of 12,000 doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine marks the first batch of vaccines to arrive in the Pacific region under the COVAX Facility, in its unprecedented effort to deliver at least two billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2021.

Prime Minister Josaia Voreqe Bainimarama in receiving the vaccines at the Nadi Airport yesterday evening stated that this is a small yet important step towards protecting Fijians from a plague that has claimed millions of lives around the world.

“These vaccines represent more than the way back to normal life; they are the shot of life our economy, our industries, and thousands of Fijian breadwinners need. It is about bringing back jobs, reconnecting families across borders and reclaiming Fiji’s rightful place in the world,” Prime Minister Bainimarama stated.

Prime Minister Bainimarama added that the only way we can ensure Fijian’s health and well-being is through being vaccinated along with the rest of the world. Moreover, under the digitalFiji umbrella, an online registration portal will ensure a smooth nationwide roll-out of the vaccinations.

Dr. Seth Berkley, CEO of Gavi, the Vaccination Alliance, emphasized that “COVAX's mission is to help end the acute phase of the pandemic as soon as possible, allowing global equitable access to vaccines against COVID-19.”

“The successful arrival of these vaccines is the product of global solidarity and partnership, and a recognition that we need to vaccinate those on the front lines of the pandemic, and the most vulnerable, in every corner of the world to ensure that all corners of the world are safe,” said UNICEF Pacific Representative Sheldon Yett. “We thank the Government of Fiji for their leadership and our partners for making this possible.”

“WHO is proud to play our part in achieving this milestone in Fiji” said the Acting WHO South Pacific Representative, Dr. Akeem Ali. “With the support from partners, Fiji has worked incredibly hard to be in a position to be able to receive the vaccine from COVAX. I would like to acknowledge the hard work by the Ministry of Health & Medical Services team in preparing for the arrival of vaccines, from identifying priority groups, developing tracking systems to upskilling their staff to be able to safely deliver this vaccine. This arrival means that frontline workers and high-risk populations can begin to be vaccinated. WHO will continue to work alongside our colleagues from the Ministries of Health in Fiji and across the Pacific to continue to plan for their use of COVID-19 vaccines.”

The Fijian Ministry of Health and Medical Services is targeting frontline staff in line with global recommendations. This will include frontline healthcare workers, selected Fiji Airways staff; Airports Fiji Limited staff; Fiji Immigration Department; along with quarantine workers as the recipients of this first batch of vaccines to support the opening of Fiji borders.

For several months, COVAX partners have been supporting governments and partners in its readiness efforts, in preparation for this moment. They have been especially active in working with countries benefitting from the Advance Market Commitment (AMC), an innovative financial mechanism to help secure global and equitable access for COVID-19 vaccines. This includes assisting with the development of national vaccination plans, support for cold chain infrastructure, as well as stockpiling of half a billion syringes and safety boxes for their disposal, masks, gloves and other equipment to ensure that there is enough equipment for health workers to start vaccinating priority groups as soon as possible.

Vaccines are now arriving in batches to supported countries following the necessary preparatory work to ensure immediate administration of vaccines to priority groups identified by national governments in their vaccine deployment plans. Fiji has completed preparatory work in good time and therefore able to receive allotted vaccines from COVAX today.

As vaccines start to roll out around the world, they should complement, and not replace, proven public health measures. It is also important to expand access to rapid diagnostics and treatments, such as oxygen and dexamethasone, as advocated for by the ACT Accelerator. Fiji like other countries will continue to apply tried-and-tested measures to successfully prevent and control transmission, such as physical distancing, masks, ventilation and hand hygiene, alongside robust programmes to test, trace, isolate and treat.

The COVAX mechanism is offering a portfolio of vaccines suitable for a range of settings and populations, and is on track to meet its goal of delivering at least two billion doses of vaccine to participating countries around the globe in 2021, including at least 1.3 billion donor-funded doses to the 92 lower-income COVAX Facility participants supported by the Gavi COVAX AMC. Fiji welcomes the arrival of this batch of vaccines and look forward to receiving additional batches needed to complete the vaccination of all eligible Fijians.

Prime Minister Bainimarama also thanked organisations behind the COVAX Facility including GAVI, the WHO, UNICEF and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Initiatives and other development partners that contributed to COVAX to help bring the vaccines to Fiji.

“For all Fijians, there is a light at the end of this tunnel, and that glimmer of hope shines brightly this evening,” Prime Minister Bainimarama added.

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