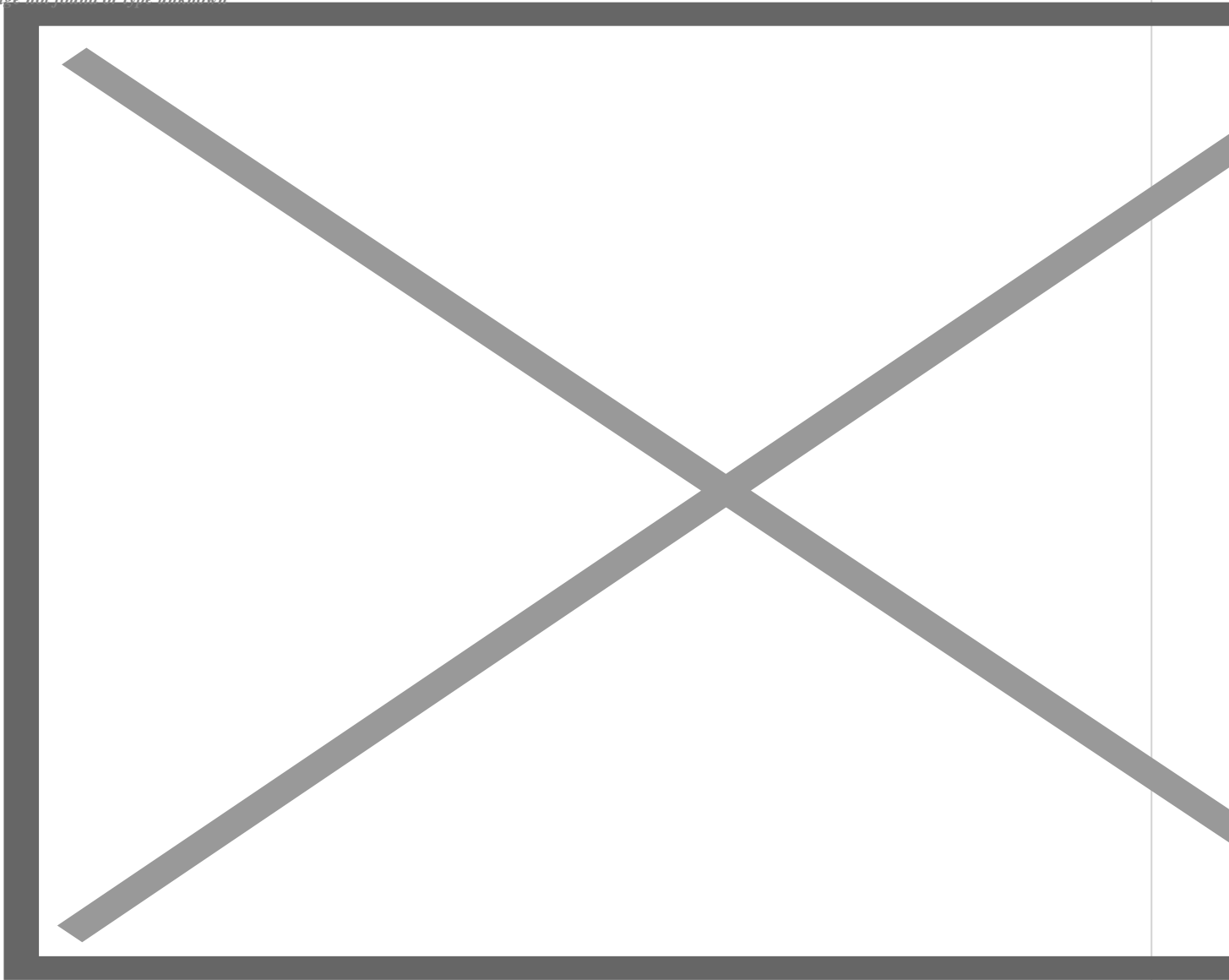


Mexico gets AstraZeneca COVID vaccine shipment from India

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Workers unload a batch of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine after its arrival at Benito Juarez's international airport in Mexico City. (Photo: Henry Romero/Reuters)

Mexico City, February 15 (RHC)-- Mexico has received a shipment of 870,000 doses of AstraZeneca's COVID-19 vaccine from India, the government said, as the country prepares to prioritise older adults in the next phase of its vaccination campaign.

Mexico is also expecting shipments of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to resume, with 494,000 doses due to arrive on Tuesday, Foreign Minister Marcelo Ebrard said during a news conference.

Sunday's shipment amounts to about 42 percent of the two million doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine, developed by Oxford University, that Mexico plans to import from India, the government said. Mexico and Argentina have an agreement with AstraZeneca to produce the vaccine for the eventual distribution of 250 million doses in Latin America, with financial support from the foundation of Mexican billionaire Carlos Slim.

Mexico started vaccinating healthcare workers in December but struggled to hit its targets amid global shortages and delays of Pfizer's vaccine. The country has reported nearly 1.98 million COVID-19 cases and more than 173,000 coronavirus-related deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University data. That is the third-highest death toll in the world after the United States and Brazil.

Mexico will next vaccinate adults above 60, a group representing 12 percent of Mexico's nearly 130 million people, between February and April. "The vaccines are already available ... and they will not stop arriving so that the national vaccination plan does not stop," President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said at the news conference in the southwestern state of Oaxaca.

The country has so far received just 1,636,350 vaccine doses, according to government data, but has agreements for millions more, including China's CanSino and the Russian Sputnik V vaccines. It received the active ingredient for two million doses of the CanSino vaccine on Thursday.

Additionally, Mexico has secured enough vaccines to cover 20 percent of its population through the global COVAX programme, which aims to ensure developing nations have access to vaccines, though shipments have yet to begin. Mexico's vaccine roll-out began on December 23, when it became the first country in Latin America to receive a shipment of doses.

But the campaign has since stalled amid mismanagement and a global shortage in vaccine production.

Many observers have put the blame for the slow roll-out squarely on Lopez Obrador, who, even after contracting COVID-19 himself, said he would still not wear a mask in public.

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