

Mexico begins vaccinating elderly against COVID-19

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The Mexican government has designated 1,000 vaccination sites, including schools and health centers, mostly in the country's poorest communities. (Photo: Carlos Jasso/Reuters)

Mexico City, February 16 (RHC)-- Mexico began vaccinating senior citizens in more than 300 municipalities across the country on Monday, after receiving approximately 870,000 doses of the AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine.

The effort was largely concentrated in remote rural communities, but hundreds of people over the age of 60 also lined up before dawn in a few far-flung corners of the sprawling capital, Mexico City, for the

chance to get vaccinated.

Officials encouraged people to not come all at once, but with shots distributed on a first-come, first-served basis, the demand was immediate. The government has designated 1,000 vaccination sites, including schools and health centres, mostly in the country's poorest communities.

The government hopes to have everyone over age 60 vaccinated by mid-April [Edgard Garrido/Reuters] President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said on Monday that bad weather and snow had kept the vaccine from arriving at some isolated areas in Mexico's northwest. He said the armed forces, which are in charge of logistics for the vaccination campaign, were working to access those areas.

Mexico started vaccinating health workers in mid-December with some 726,000 doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. In addition to the AstraZeneca shots, two million doses of the Chinese CanSino vaccine are being bottled in Mexico. Another shipment of Pfizer's vaccine is also expected this week. Russia's Sputnik V vaccine and another from China, which have received emergency approval from Mexican regulators, are also expected later this year.

Lopez Obrador, who tested positive for COVID-19 last month but has since recovered, encouraged seniors to get vaccinated. "There aren't risks ... On the contrary, it is to protect them," he said, adding the government plans to make the vaccine available to everyone. "It's for the rich and the poor, it's for everyone," he said.

While some getting vaccinated Monday in the capital had registered on the site and received a text message confirming their slot, officials said seniors who showed up would not be turned away [Carlos Jasso/Reuters]

Mexico has reported more than 1.9 million COVID-19 cases and more than 174,000 coronavirus-related deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University data.

The government said it wants to have everyone over age 60 vaccinated by mid-April, which would require getting at least one dose into the arms of more than 15 million people in less than two months. Mexico created a website for seniors to register for the vaccine, but it experienced technical problems in the initial days due to high demand.

While some people getting vaccinated on Monday in Mexico City had registered on the site and received a text message confirming their timeslot, officials said seniors who showed up would not be turned away.

Local media reported that dozens of sites were set up in three neighbourhoods located on the outskirts of the city, where officials plan on administering nearly 80,000 doses by Friday.

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