

Peru's former President Vizcarra tests positive for COVID-19

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Former Peruvian President Martin Vizcarra received a Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine in October last year [File: Sebastian Castaneda/Reuters]

Lima, April 26 (RHC)-- Former Peruvian President Martin Vizcarra, who this month was barred from holding public office for allegedly jumping the queue to receive a coronavirus vaccine last year, has said he and his wife have tested positive for COVID-19.

Vizcarra tweeted on Sunday that the pair tested positive “despite the necessary care to avoid bringing the virus home” and are symptomatic. “My family is taking the necessary isolation measures. Let’s not let our guard down,” he said.

Vizcarra has faced criticism for not wearing a mask or following physical distancing rules during his election campaign ahead of April 11 polls to choose Peru’s next Congress and president. Earlier this year, he was embroiled in a “VIP Vaccines” scandal in which several government ministers and public officials receive Chinese Sinopharm COVID-19 jabs before they were publicly available.

Vizcarra has denied any wrongdoing, saying he and his wife were inoculated in October 2020 because they volunteered to take part in a clinical trial. The doctor in charge of the trial disputed that, however.

Dr German Malaga testified in Peru’s parliament in mid-February that Vizcarra had asked him for two vaccines and said Vizcarra knew he and his wife would be getting the real vaccine. On April 17, Peru’s Congress barred the former president from holding public office for 10 years over the scandal, finding him guilty of influence peddling, collusion and making false declarations.

Congress also barred former Health Minister Pilar Mazzetti and ex-Foreign Minister Elizabeth Astete from holding public office for eight years and one year, respectively. Mazzetti and Astete both resigned over the vaccine scandal.

Peru has reported at least 1.75 million cases of COVID-19 and more than 59,400 deaths since the pandemic started, according to a tally from Johns Hopkins University. The country, like several others in Latin America, has seen a surge in COVID-19 infections and deaths in recent weeks, prompting officials to put stricter public health measures in place.

People wait to receive a COVID-19 vaccine in Lima, Peru on April 16 [Sebastian Castaneda/Reuters]
The government on Saturday issued a decree that will require Peruvians to wear two masks inside businesses such as grocery stores, shopping centres and pharmacies, and in busy public areas, starting on Monday. People already have to wear plastic face shields.

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