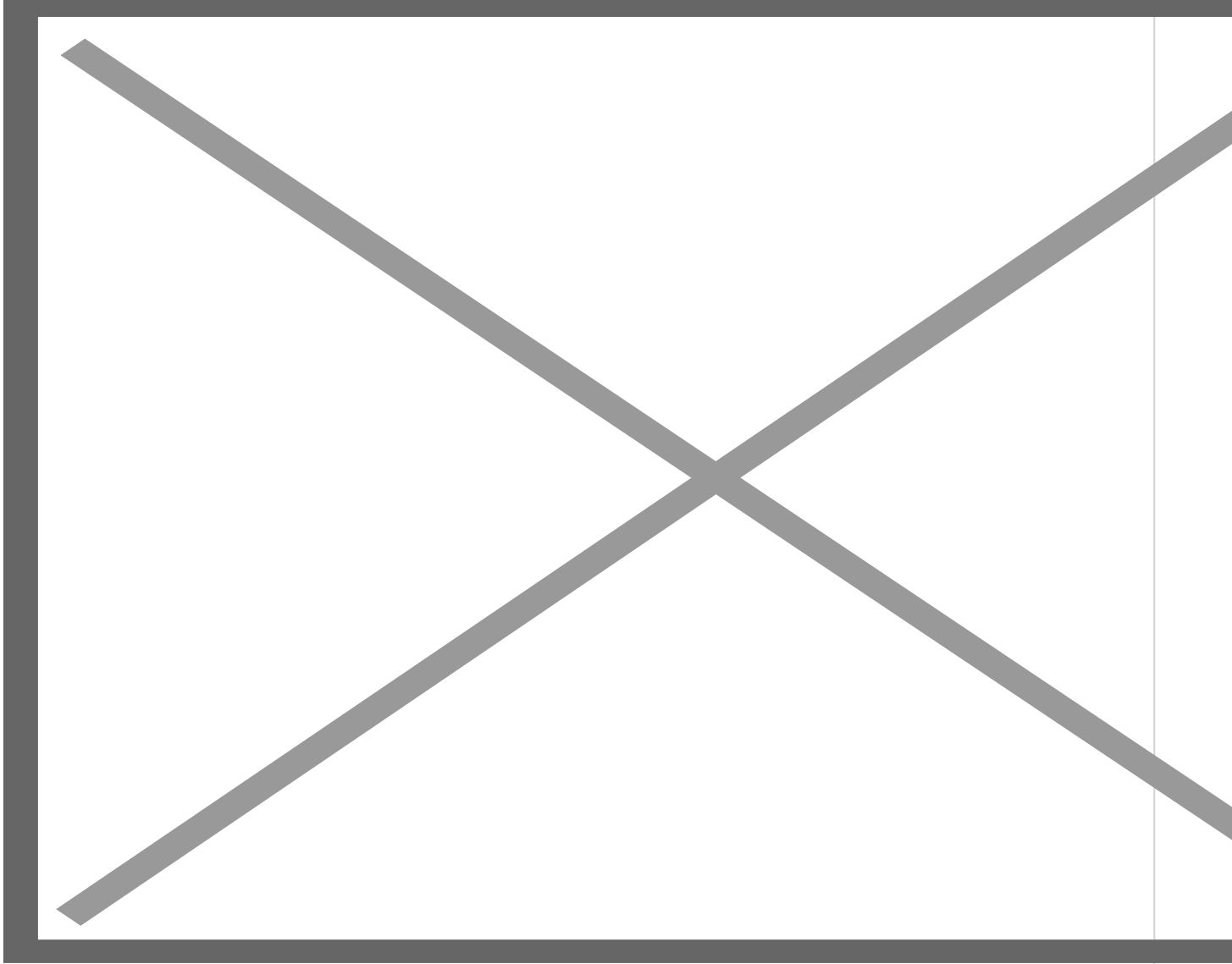


African Union to buy up to 110 million Moderna COVID vaccines

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The new shipments are well below what Africa needs to vaccinate its 1.3 billion people [Siphiwe Sibeko/Reuters]

Addis Ababa, October 26 (RHC)-- The African Union (AU) intends to buy up to 110 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines from Moderna Inc in an arrangement brokered in part by the White House which will defer delivery of some doses intended for the United States to facilitate the deal, officials told Reuters news agency.

The AU's doses will be delivered over the coming months, with 15 million arriving before the end of the year, 35 million in the first quarter of 2022 and up to 60 million in the second quarter.

"This is important as it allows us to increase the number of vaccines available immediately," AU coronavirus envoy Strive Masiyiwa said in an e-mail. "We urge other vaccine producing countries to follow the lead of the [US government] and give us similar access to buy this and other vaccines." Masiyiwa said the Moderna purchase represented the first time the 55-member AU secured vaccines not fully produced in Africa.

Natalie Quillian, the White House's deputy coordinator for COVID-19 response, said the Biden administration is deferring delivery of 33 million doses it had bought from Moderna to give the AU its "spot in line" to make a purchase.

"We are grateful to have helped negotiate this encouraging step forward between Moderna and the African Union that will significantly expand access to vaccines on the continent in the near term," Quillian said. The new shipments are well below what Africa needs to vaccinate its 1.3 billion people, who have had far less access to the life-saving vaccines than more prosperous parts of the world.

The U.S., which has reported more than 700,000 COVID deaths, is flush with vaccines. The delayed Moderna deliveries will not have an effect on efforts to provide booster shots to already inoculated Americans, Quillian said.

Moderna said it was working to make it possible to fill doses of its COVID-19 vaccines in Africa by 2023 and has plans to build a manufacturing plant on the continent. "This is the first step in our long-term partnership with the African Union," Moderna Chief Executive Stephane Bancel said in a statement, referring to a Memorandum of Understanding to make up to 110 million doses for the AU.

Last month, the AU accused COVID-19 vaccine manufacturers of denying African countries a fair chance to buy vaccines and urged manufacturing countries, in particular India, to lift export restrictions on vaccines and their components.

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