



SHOT IN THE ARM:

INSIDE ZIMBABWE'S VACCINE PROCUREMENT PLAN

Zimbabwe began its COVID-19 vaccination programme on February 18, 2021.

In this report, the Public Health Information Lab (PHILA), a public health initiative of newZWire, looks at the country's vaccine procurement plan; what vaccines have been imported so far, what has informed the choice of vaccine, and where it goes to from now.

COVID-19: CRISIS AND PREPARATION

Zimbabwe recorded its first case of COVID-19 on March 20, 2020. The first death was reported on March 23. On the first anniversary of the first case, 1 510 people had died, and a total of 36 652 cases had been recorded.

The country's healthcare system, which suffers from years of underinvestment, poor working conditions and lack of skills, was pushed to the brink.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Which vaccines have been authorised in Zimbabwe?
- Which vaccines have been bought?
- How is Zimbabwe funding procurement?

VACCINES: WHAT IS THE PLAN?

On February 16, 2021, the Ministry of Health presented its vaccine rollout strategy to Parliament.

The government plans to vaccinate at least 10 million people, to cover about 60% of Zimbabwe's population. Initially, the schedule was targeted at vaccinating just over 60,000 people in the first round, including health workers in the public service and medical staff in the security services, ZIMRA and immigration department personnel as well as agriculture extension workers.

The plan was however changed, and was opened up to all in March.

WHICH VACCINES HAVE BEEN AUTHORISED IN ZIMBABWE?

As at the start of April, Zimbabwe had authorised four vaccines:

- Sinopharm (China)
- Sinovac (China)
- Covaxin (India)
- Sputnik V (Russia)



WHO DECIDES ON VACCINES?

Zimbabwe's COVID-19 response is led by National COVID-19 Coordinator, Dr Agnes Mahomva, advised by a panel of medical experts, appointed in September 2020.

In deciding on vaccines, Zimbabwe conducted a baseline readiness assessment in October and November. The assessments included the Inter-agency Co-ordination Committee on Immunisation and the Zimbabwe Immunisation Technical Advisory Group (ZIMNITAG).

The ZIMNITAG, made up of local health experts, government agencies and development partners, is an already existing entity that advises on the National Immunisation Policy.

Included in the October-November studies were local representatives of the WHO, who sit on the COVID-19 advisory panel, as well as UNICEF.

According to the government, all recommended vaccines are verified by the Pharmacovigilance and Clinical Trials Committee before clearance by the Medicines Control Authority of Zimbabwe. The Pharmacovigilance and Clinical Trials Committee is also responsible for monitoring safety and effectiveness of the vaccine during use.



WHICH VACCINES HAVE BEEN BOUGHT?

As at the start of April, Zimbabwe had procured the following vaccines:

- 1,2 million doses bought from Sinovac in China
- 400,000 Sinopharm doses donated by China
- 35,000 Covaxin doses donated by India

WHY THESE VACCINES?

According to Dr Mahomva, the major question the experts ask when picking a vaccine is whether it is right for Zimbabwe and its conditions.

“Some of the key strategies include first careful review of the country context in which the vaccines are to be introduced,” she says.

One such condition is the need to maintain the “cold chain”.

The AstraZeneca, Sinopharm and Sputnik V vaccines need simple refrigeration of 2-8 degrees Celsius. Pfizer, instead, needs to be frozen at -70C, making it more expensive to distribute and hence unlikely to be chosen by Zimbabwe.

The existence of a variant first detected in South Africa may also have influenced decisions on vaccines. South

Africa rejected AstraZeneca after tests found that it was not as effective against the variant. Local also showed that same variant is dominant in Zimbabwe.

Two other variants have been identified in the country, according to a paper authored by a team of scientists and published by the Lancet Microbe journal on March 10, 2021.

Zimbabwe’s relationship with China also helped Zimbabwe to secure vaccines early.

After early tests showed that Sinovac, Sinopharm and Sputnik V can neutralise variants, including the one dominant in South Africa, South African president Cyril Ramaphosa announced on March 30: “We are also in various stages of negotiations with the manufacturers of other vaccines such as Sinovac, Sinopharm and Sputnik V. Some of these manufacturers in the final stages of the approval process for use of the vaccines in South Africa.”

Namibia is also using Sinopharm.

HOW MUCH HAS ZIMBABWE PAID FOR VACCINES?

At a post-Cabinet press briefing on March 30, Deputy Health Minister Dr John Mangwiro said Zimbabwe had paid US\$10 per dose for the Sinovac vaccines. This means that, as at that time, Zimbabwe had spent US\$12 million on vaccines.

How does this price compare?

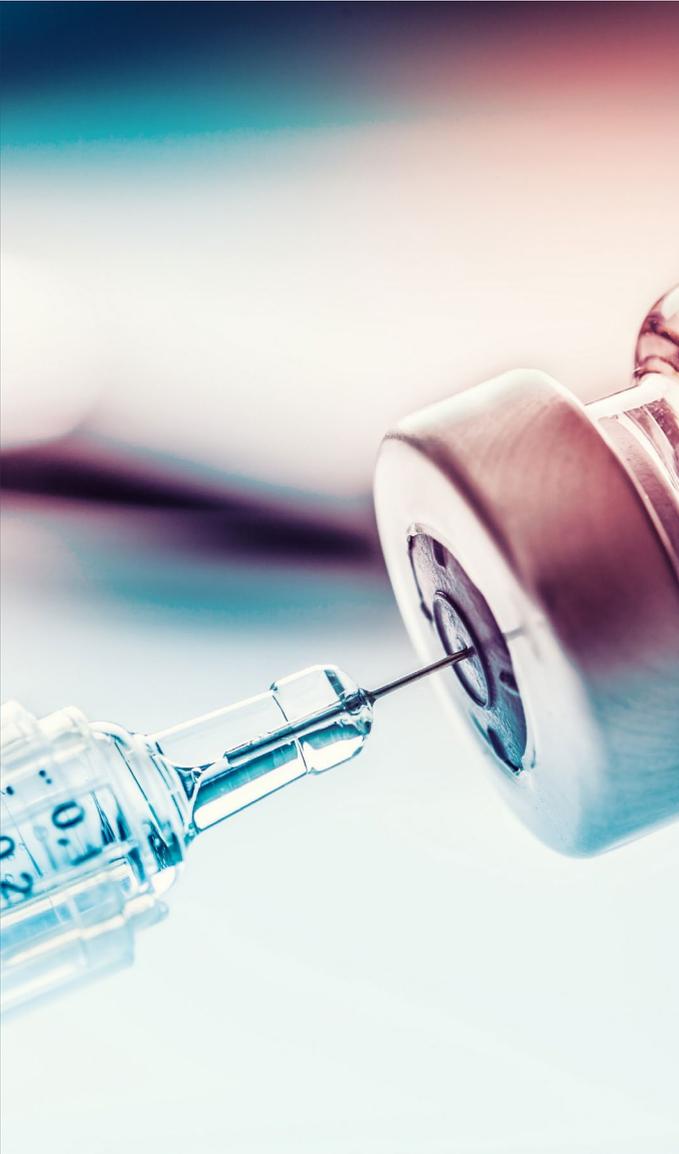
Many governments do not publicly disclose what they pay for vaccines. This is because of agreements with suppliers, who prefer to keep vaccine costs confidential.

However, based on press reports, the US\$10 per dose paid for Sinovac by Zimbabwe matches the price that South Africa has paid for the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. In February, Senegal announced that it paid US\$19 per shot for 200,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccine.

In December, Reuters reported that the EU, which kept its vaccine contracts secret, bought Pfizer vaccines for US\$18.90 per dose.

Under the AU vaccine facility, Africa will pay US\$6.75 a dose for Pfizer and US\$10 for Johnson & Johnson.

Sputnik V, the Russian vaccine also authorised for use in Zimbabwe, is selling 300 million shots to the AU at US\$9.75 per dose. The Indian government has set a maximum price of about US\$3.42 for local private sales of Covaxin, also been cleared in Zimbabwe.



HOW MUCH IS ZIMBABWE SPENDING ON VACCINATION?

Zimbabwe has budgeted US\$100 million for vaccines. In addition, a budget of US\$6.8 million was set aside to cover the distribution side of the rollout. The operations budget covers planning, training, allowances, PPE, logistics, surveillance and waste disposal.

HOW IS ZIMBABWE FUNDING PROCUREMENT?

Appearing before Parliament's budget committee in March, Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube said the money would come from the budget. This would include "redirecting" money from other purposes in the budget.

He said: "We have got our own resources to the tune of \$8.3 billion, which is the US\$100 million."

Zimbabwe's plan is to buy a million additional vaccines each month over the quarter.

WHAT OTHER VACCINES ARE AVAILABLE?

Zimbabwe is eligible for three million doses under the African Union's vaccine facility. For this one, Afreximbank pays for the vaccine on the country's behalf, and the country pays off the money over a period of up to five years. Zimbabwe would have to pay US\$20.5 million for all its allocated 3 010 283 doses.

Zimbabwe is also eligible for 984,000 doses under the COVAX facility, which is led by the WHO and Gavi, the global vaccine alliance. However, Zimbabwe did not take up its share in the first round of allocations, because the doses on offer were AstraZeneca.

Zimbabwe is also negotiating to buy Sputnik V vaccines, in addition to pledged donations from Russia.



HOW ARE THE VACCINES BEING DISTRIBUTED?

According to the Ministry of Health, Zimbabwe has relied on its existing immunisation network to provide the backbone for vaccine distribution. Called the Expanded Program on Immunisation, the system already distributes other vaccines and medicines,

from national stores to local clinics.

Is there anybody monitoring safety and effectiveness?

The pharmacovigilance and clinical trials committee will implement vaccine vigilance plans to monitor the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccines in use. The MCAZ has also recently announced that it has made available an online platform to report side effects.