

BRAZIL PRIVATE CLINICS SEEK DEAL FOR INDIAN COVID-19 VACCINE

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A Brazilian association of private health clinics said Sunday it was negotiating with Indian pharmaceutical firm Bharat Biotech to buy five million doses of its [Covid-19 vaccine](#), which India has just authorized for emergency use.

The Brazilian Association of Vaccine Clinics (ABCVAC) confirmed on its website it had signed a memorandum of understanding with the Indian firm to purchase its Covaxin vaccine, which is currently in the final stage of clinical trials.

Any final deal would be subject to approval by Brazil's health regulator, Anvisa, which has yet to approve any vaccines against the new coronavirus.

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Far-right President Jair Bolsonaro's government faces mounting criticism of dragging its feet on a vaccination campaign in Brazil, which has the second-highest death toll in the pandemic, after the United States.

That has left some state governments, and now the private sector, scrambling to try to launch vaccination drives on their own.

ABCVAC described its planned deal with Bharat Biotech as a way to ensure Brazilians using the private health system -- typically the wealthy -- would have access to a vaccine, even as the government reserves its own initial doses for the public health system and high-priority groups such as health workers and the elderly.

"We had been looking for solutions for the private market, and the possibility came up of using this Indian vaccine, which is very promising," ABCVAC president Geraldo Barbosa told TV network Globo News.

"It's an additional sale that will not interfere with the quantity of vaccine doses the government has ordered."

ABCVAC representatives will travel to [India](#) Monday to continue negotiations, the association said.

It said its clinics could begin vaccinating people by the second half of March, pending the conclusion of clinical trials and regulatory approval from Anvisa.

India approved vaccines from both Bharat and Britain's Oxford University earlier Sunday for "restricted use in emergency situations," even though the former is still in testing.

The country has set an ambitious target of vaccinating 300 million of its 1.3 billion people by mid-year.

Brazil is meanwhile struggling to get its vaccination campaign off the ground, amid political squabbling and vaccine skepticism from Bolsonaro.

The president regularly flouts expert advice on containing the pandemic and says he does not plan to get a Covid-19 shot himself.

The government has secured 100 million doses of the Oxford vaccine, but has yet to set a start date, get regulatory approval or acquire the necessary syringes.

Brazil's health ministry is due to announce the start date for its vaccination campaign Monday.

Earlier Sunday, Anvisa authorized the importation of the first two million doses of the Oxford vaccine, pending approval for their use.

- 'Intolerable' vaccine delays -

But many accuse the government of waiting too long.

The situation has grown "intolerable," Supreme Court Justice Gilmar Mendes said in a blistering tweet.

"Neighboring countries have already started their vaccination campaigns. It is urgent we establish a timeframe to do the same. Ignorance must not prevail over science," he wrote.

There are warning signs the virus is surging again in Brazil.

Experts say the country of 212 million people is being hit by a second wave, and areas that once seemed to have brought the virus under control are again facing an onslaught of cases and deaths.

That includes the Amazon rainforest state of Amazonas, whose capital, Manaus, was devastated by the virus last year, with haunting scenes of mass graves and corpses piled in refrigerator trucks.

After a lull in cases in the second half of 2020 -- leading some experts to wonder whether so many people had been infected that the city reached "herd immunity" -- the virus is now exploding again in the region.

With its morgues overwhelmed, Manaus has again deployed refrigerator trucks outside hospitals to store cadavers. A judge on Saturday ordered the Amazonas government to shut down all non-essential businesses and activities for 15 days to slow the spread of the virus.

Brazil has recorded more than 196,000 deaths from Covid-19.

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