

Moderna struggling to supply promised doses of Covid vaccine

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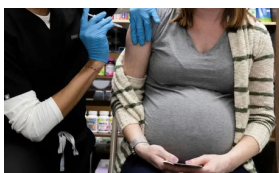
📷 The Moderna vaccine is the third to be approved for use in the UK. Photograph: Angela Weiss/AFP/Getty Images

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The US pharmaceutical company Moderna, which produces the newest vaccine to be rolled out in the UK, is struggling to supply promised shots because of issues with increasing production at its European plant, in the latest problem to hit global vaccination plans.

In a statement on Friday, the company suggested supply of the vaccine would be reduced this month, with doses earmarked for the UK, Canada and other countries expected to be affected.



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While Moderna produces vaccines for the US market at its facility in Massachusetts, the company said issues with its European supply chain, which it is undertaking in partnership with the Swiss company Lonza Group AG, had caused the shortfall.

The Moderna statement came as Canada announced that the company would be delivering only about half of its planned 1.2m doses by the end of April.

“The trajectory of vaccine manufacturing ramp-up is not linear, and despite best efforts, there is a shortfall in previously estimated doses,” Moderna said on Friday. “Vaccine manufacturing is a highly complex process and a number of elements, including human and material resources, have factored into this volatility.”

The UK government insisted that despite the news it remained on track to meet its target of offering at least a first vaccination to all adults by the end of July.

The Moderna vaccine has become the third Covid jab to be approved for use in the UK, but it has been ordered in relatively small numbers – 17m doses – when compared with Oxford/AstraZeneca (100m) and Pfizer (40m). The UK has also placed orders for five other vaccines types.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesperson said: “We’ve always been clear supply will fluctuate. We remain in constant contact with all vaccine manufacturers to understand and manage supply issues. We have hit our target to offer a vaccine to everyone in phase 1 of the vaccination programme and we remain on track to offer a jab to all adults by the end of July.”



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Like the controversial case of AstraZeneca before it, Moderna and Lonza appear to have struggled to ramp up production of the vaccine in Europe, threatening further global shortages of much-needed shots.

The Moderna issues come hard on the heels of a pause in the US of the supply of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and problems with the production of the AstraZeneca vaccine in India.

Vaccine manufacturers have been constrained by multiple factors as new inoculations have been approved including shortages of key ingredients and so-called fill and finish products, as well as quality control issues and problems with lower vaccine yields than expected from the new production facilities.

This has been complicated by vaccine nationalism as countries have competed over their share of doses. The immediate impact of the Moderna problems was already being felt in Canada including in the city of Ottawa which was informed earlier this week of a delay in supplies.

“I must, unfortunately, report that we have been told there’s going to be a delay in Moderna,” said Anthony Di Monte, an official involved in the city’s vaccination programme. “So we had a regular stream of getting a certain amount of Pfizer, about 25,000 doses a week, and every second week we get a batch of Moderna.”

Lonza did not immediately return a phone call and email seeking comment on any issues in its production.

Agencies contributed to this report

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