

WHO setting up hub to make Covid-19 vaccines in South Africa - Tedros

The World Health Organisation (WHO) said that it is setting up a technology transfer hub for producing mRNA Covid-19 vaccines in South Africa, which could start manufacturing doses in nine to 12 months.



World Health Organisation (WHO) director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus speaks as he attends the World Health Assembly (WHA) amid the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in Geneva, Switzerland, 24 May 2021. Christopher Black/World Health Organisation/Handout via Reuters

WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus made the announcement aimed at boosting access to vaccines across the African continent, where cases and deaths had increased by almost 40% over the past week.

“ Today I am delighted to announce that WHO is in discussions with a consortium of companies and institutions to establish a technology transfer hub in South Africa. ”

"The consortium involves a company Afrigen Biologics & Vaccines, which will act as the hub both by manufacturing mRNA vaccines itself & by providing training to a manufacturer Biovac," he said.

WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan said that there were several options on the table, mainly smaller companies and biotechs, adding: "But we are also in discussions with larger mRNA companies and hope very much they will come on board."

Pfizer and BioNTech, along with Moderna are the main producers of Covid-19 vaccines using mRNA technology.

“ We could see within nine to 12 months vaccines being produced in Africa, South Africa. ”

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa said: "Through this initiative we will change the narrative of an Africa that is a centre of disease and poor development."

Ramaphosa, referring to talks at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on its proposal for a waiver on intellectual property on Covid-19 vaccines, added: "Today is historic and we see this as a step in the right direction but it does not distract us from our original proposal put together by India and South Africa that we should see a Trips waiver at the WTO."

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