China sidesteps global safety norms, injecting thousands with potentially risky COVID vaccines

The world still lacks a proven coronavirus vaccine, but that has not stopped Chinese officials from trying to inoculate tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of people outside the traditional testing process. Three vaccine candidates are being injected into workers whom the government considers essential, along with many others, including employees of the pharmaceutical firms themselves.

Officials are laying out plans to give shots to even more people, citing emergency use, amounting to a big wager that the vaccines will eventually prove to be safe and effective.

China's rush has bewildered global experts. No other country has injected people with unproven vaccines outside the usual drug trial process to such a huge scale.

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The vaccine candidates are in Phase 3 trials, or the late stages of testing, which are mostly being conducted outside China. The people in those trials are closely tracked and monitored. It is not clear that China is taking those steps for everyone who is getting the shots within the country.

The unproven vaccines could have harmful side effects. Ineffective vaccines could lead to a false sense of security and encourage behavior that could lead to even more infections.

The wide use of vaccines also raises issues of consent, especially for employees of Chinese vaccine makers and state-owned companies who might feel pressure to roll up their sleeves.

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