

Eastern European countries that opted for less expensive (and possibly less safe and effective) AstraZeneca vaccine see surge in cases as supplies lag

Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia, which declined part of their Pfizer allotments to wait for Astra doses, are among the slowest in the bloc to administer vaccines, according to a European Union document seen by Bloomberg. While Pfizer has met its commitments, Astra has delivered just 30 million of its originally committed 120 million doses in the first quarter.

As a result, Bulgaria and Croatia are expected to vaccinate 45% of their populations by the middle of the year, according to the document, the lowest in the EU after the Czech Republic. Estonia will vaccinate 50%, Latvia 53% and Slovakia 46%. That compares to 61% in Germany, 80% in Denmark and 93% in Malta.

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So far, the EU has administered 15.5 doses per 100 people, less than a third of what the U.K. has managed. The U.S. has given 45 shots per 100 people.

The EU is discussing a mechanism to divert a batch of 10 million Pfizer doses that will be delivered earlier than expected to some of those countries in need. The latest proposal would see five of those countries — Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia and Slovakia — share 3 million of the extra shots, according to two people familiar with the talks.

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