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Monkeypox

European men struggle to access monkeypox jabs

Some people are travelling abroad to get vaccinated in wake of severe shortages and increasing case numbers



People queue in Lille, northern France, on Saturday to receive the monkeypox vaccine © Francois Lo Presti/AFP/Getty Images

Donato Paolo Mancini and **Josh Spero** in London 7 HOURS AGO

People living in Europe are crossing borders to obtain the monkeypox jab as authorities in their own countries struggle to provide doses because of severe vaccine shortages and increasing case numbers.

In Italy, inoculations will start this week. A total of 4,200 doses have been allocated to regions where caseloads are high, according to the health ministry, with stock left over for emergencies. Extra doses are expected later in August.

Marco Stizioli, of sexual health advocacy group PrEP in Italia, said the slow pace of the rollout was “making some men who have sex with men get vaccinated overseas”.

“Where the state is unable to act, it’s the community’s ability to network internationally and exchange information that makes the difference,” he said, adding that Italy’s official caseload, of about 500, was “most certainly” an underestimate because of limited testing.

People in several European countries told the Financial Times they were travelling abroad, both inside and outside the EU, to get vaccinated.

Benjamin Michelet, a Lausanne resident working in government, travelled to Paris because the shot was not yet available in Switzerland.

“I feel like we have been betrayed once, like the previous generations of gay guys have been betrayed by governments in the Aids crisis,” said Michelet. “I’m lucky enough maybe to live in a better era where medicine is available so if I can get some, I will get some,” he said, adding that being vaccinated was also a way of preventing the disease from spreading.

Men whom the FT spoke to said they were using a combination of formal sources, such as government websites, and informal networks, for example Instagram posts from friends and LGBT+ community organisations, to learn where the vaccine was available. In France, these men reported they were not being asked for residency information.

More than 27,000 cases have been recorded since May, the vast majority among men who have sex with men.

Emer Cooke, head of the European Medicines Agency, told the FT there were “limited supplies of vaccine”, shortages that would continue for some time. The agency has recently approved an additional production site for Bavarian Nordic, the vaccine manufacturer, and authorised imports from the US. The vaccine, originally devised for smallpox, is known as Imvanex in Europe and Jynneos in the US.

Cooke said it was not clear when extra shipments would be available and said the agency had begun to “look into” a potentially suitable vaccine made by Japanese company KM Biologics. She noted however that not many manufacturers were working in this area.

Smallpox vaccine stock had been kept to hedge against a potential resurgence of the disease, which the World Health Organization declared eradicated in 1980, for example in the form of a bioweapon. Because the [monkeypox](#) virus is similar to smallpox, the vaccine is believed to prevent monkeypox’s spread or lessen its severity, though few data are available.

Bavarian Nordic said it had increased production. It said it had delivered, “at an early stage”, to all major countries and to the EU’s procurement mechanism, Hera, adding that EU states had ordered “far more” doses.

Other European countries also have shortages. LGBT+ groups have raised concerns about [supplies in the UK](#), warning that the disease might become endemic unless more doses are secured.

Jean-Michel Molina, an infectious disease professor at the Paris Cité university, said France had changed its strategy to maximise coverage for first doses. It had delayed second doses by several weeks to bolster the public health impact, though he said there was so far no shortage in France.

A similar strategy was adopted in some countries at the start of the rollout of Covid-19 vaccines in 2021, when supplies were scarce.

The EMA’s Cooke stressed that, while the vaccine would be useful, it was “unlikely to be a game changer”. The priority, she said, was to contain the current outbreak through the isolation and quarantine of positive cases and their contacts.