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Belarus Starts Coronavirus Vaccination With Sputnik V

By AFP

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Belarus has become the first country outside Russia to use the Moscow-developed vaccine. **Sergei Kiselyov/ Moskva News Agency**

Belarus on Tuesday began a vaccination drive against coronavirus using the Sputnik V jab, becoming the first country outside Russia to use the vaccine developed by Moscow.

Belarus, with a population of around 9.5 million people, has registered more than 188,000 cases of coronavirus infections and nearly 1,400 deaths.

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"Today the first vaccine shipment has arrived in Belarus," said the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) which financed Sputnik V.

RDIF spokesman Arseny Palagin did not say how many doses had been sent to Belarus.

Belarus Health Minister Dmitry Pinevich said health workers and teachers would be among the first Belarusians to be inoculated.

"We thank Russia for active mutual work and strategic cooperation to solve this issue," Pinevich was quoted as saying in the joint statement.

Kirill Dmitriyev, RDIF general director, said Russia planned to begin producing Sputnik V in the ex-Soviet country to "simplify logistics" and speed up the vaccination campaign.

Russia in August was the first country to announce the registration of a coronavirus vaccine — dubbed Sputnik V after the Soviet-era satellite — but did so ahead of large scale clinical trials.

Western and some Russian experts have raised concerns over the fast-tracked jab and critics have described it as a tool to bolster Russia's geopolitical influence.

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