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# Putin, Germany's Merkel Discuss Joint Coronavirus Vaccine Production

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**Sergei Kisilyev / Moskva News Agency**

Russian President Vladimir Putin and German Chancellor Angela Merkel discussed by phone the potential for joint production of a coronavirus vaccine, the Kremlin said Tuesday.

Putin and Merkel discussed cooperation in the fight against Covid-19 "with an emphasis on potential prospects for the joint production of vaccines," according to a statement on the Kremlin's website.

The talks follow Putin's admission last year that domestic equipment shortages could delay Russia's Sputnik V vaccine from entering mass production. Reports also said Russia was struggling with production capacity issues and problems with scalability and quality control.

Alexander Gintsburg, the director of the state-run Gamaleya research center that developed Sputnik, on Tuesday said that over 1 million people in Russia have received the jab so far.

**Related article**: 5 Questions About Russia's Sputnik V Vaccine, Answered

More than 50 countries have bought or agreed to localize production of over 1 billion Sputnik V doses, with initial batches arriving in Argentina, Serbia and Belarus. Hungary, which received 6,000 doses that have not yet received regulatory clearance, has said it could abstain from using Sputnik V due to limited production capacity for the vaccine.

Last month, Russian and German health ministers agreed to discuss the search for "production facilities" for the joint manufacture of Russian-made Covid-19 vaccines. Russia's state-run TASS news agency reported that Berlin told Moscow it was ready "to involve German companies in joint production of Russian vaccines."

Putin and Merkel agreed to maintain health ministry-level contacts on the joint production of a Covid-19 vaccine, the Kremlin said in Tuesday's statement.

Both Russia and Germany have recently started mass vaccination drives at home to curb the spread of the coronavirus and avoid re-imposing nationwide lockdowns. Germany is using the vaccine jointly developed by Pfizer and the Mainz-based company BioNtech.

In another sign of recognition for the Sputnik jab that has been viewed with skepticism by the West, British-Swedish drugmaker AstraZeneca in December announced a clinical trial program that would use a combination of its vaccine and the Russian one.

Some critics have described it as a tool to bolster Russia's geopolitical influence.

*AFP contributed reporting.*

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