

Israel to give 5,000 doses of coronavirus vaccine to Palestinians



A Palestinian boy inspects the damage in his family home following Israeli airstrikes in Buriej refugee camp, central Gaza Strip, Saturday, Aug. 15, 2020. (AP Photo/Khalil Hamra).

Israel has agreed to transfer 5,000 doses of the coronavirus vaccine to the Palestinians to immunize frontline medical workers, Israeli defence minister Benny Gantz's office said.

It is the first time that Israel has confirmed the transfer of vaccines to the Palestinians, who lag far behind Israel's aggressive vaccination campaign and have not yet received any vaccines.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has raised concerns about the disparity

between Israel and Palestinians living in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, and international human rights groups and UN experts have said Israel is responsible for the wellbeing of Palestinians in these areas.

Israel says that under interim peace agreements reached in the 1990s, it is not responsible for the Palestinians and in any case, has not received requests for help.

Mr Gantz's office said early on Sunday that the transfer had been approved.

It had no further details on when that would happen.

Israel is one of the world's leaders in vaccinating its population after striking procurement deals with international pharmaceutical giants Pfizer and Moderna.

The Health Ministry says nearly one-third of Israel's 9.3 million people have received the first dose of the vaccine, while about 1.7 million people have received both doses.

The campaign includes Israel's Arab citizens and Palestinians living in annexed east Jerusalem.

But Palestinians living in the West Bank under the autonomy government of the Palestinian Authority and those living under Hamas rule in Gaza are not included.

The Palestinian Authority has been trying to acquire doses through a WHO programme known as Covax.

But the programme, which aims to procure vaccines for needy countries, has been slow to get off the ground.

The dispute reflects global inequality in access to vaccines, as wealthy countries vacuum up the lion's share of doses, leaving poorer countries even farther behind in combating the public health and economic effects of the pandemic.

It has also emerged as another flashpoint in the decades-old Middle East conflict, even as the virus has wreaked havoc on both sides.

Source:

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