



Pfizer wants EU to keep paying for unused Covid jabs – FT

Description

EU: Officials in some EU states say the bloc is forcing them to foot the bill for millions of unused vaccine doses

Pfizer has offered to extend its Covid-19 vaccine contract with the European Union while scaling back deliveries, but still expects the bloc to pay billions of euros for unused doses amid a major supply glut in some countries, the Financial Times has reported. The offer prompted outrage from a handful of member states, who say the deal would serve the interests of Big Pharma over their own citizens.

The contract extension would push the vaccine agreement out to 2026, with a proposed 40% reduction in the number of doses supplied as well as delays to deliveries, the newspaper reported on Tuesday, citing two unnamed officials.

However, despite the suggested cuts, the US pharma giant still insists that it be paid for the full number of doses originally agreed upon, many of which would never be produced under the new terms.

The amendments to the deal – the full text of which has never been made public – were presented by European health commissioner Stella Kyriakides during a closed-door meeting in Brussels on Tuesday, but faced objections from some EU members.

In a joint statement issued following the meeting, officials from Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania and Poland said they would not sign the agreement with the proposed changes, as they *“do not present a final and fair solution to the problems of the Covid-19 vaccine surplus and do not meet the needs of the healthcare systems, the needs of citizens and the financial interests of the member states.”*

Polish Health Minister Adam Niedzielski argued that the current Pfizer proposal would favor Big Pharma, and has called for the secretive contract to be published, questioning the role European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen played in the negotiations for the massive vaccine deal.

An EU watchdog launched a probe into the negotiation and procurement process late last year, after

von der Leyen's office failed to produce personal text messages sent to Pfizer CEO Albert Bourla during the talks for nearly 2 billion vaccine doses, prompting accusations of corruption.

The 27-member bloc originally signed a joint contract with Pfizer in 2020, but since the pandemic receded, demand for vaccines has steadily dropped, leaving an overabundance across the continent. Some countries have been forced to throw away vaccines, with Germany alone tossing out some 36.6 million doses, according to public broadcaster BR24, while others are sitting on large stocks of unused shots, such as Austria, which has reported around 17.5 million in its supply.

However, Czech Health Minister Vlastimil Valek pushed back on the criticisms, arguing that the *"majority of countries"* had agreed to the deal and that *"the contract is not bad."* He added that the large stock of doses would not pose a problem as *"Covid is still here"* and *"It will be necessary to repeat vaccination each year for a particular group of patients."*

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