

Coronavirus

Foundation to spend \$1.3b

Africa desperately short of COVID jab

CAPE TOWN, South Africa, June 9, (AP): In the global race to vaccinate people against COVID-19, Africa is tragically at the back of the pack.

In fact, it has barely gotten out of the starting blocks. In South Africa, which has the continent's most robust economy and its biggest coronavirus caseload, just 0.8% of the population is fully vaccinated, according to a worldwide tracker kept by Johns Hopkins University. And hundreds of thousands of the country's health workers, many of whom come face-to-face with the virus every day, are still waiting for their shots.

In Nigeria, Africa's biggest country with more than 200 million people, only 0.1% are fully protected. Kenya, with 50 million people, is even lower. Uganda has recalled doses from rural areas because it doesn't have nearly enough to fight outbreaks in big cities.

Chad didn't administer its first vaccine shots until this past weekend. And there are at least five other countries in Africa where not one dose has been put into an arm, according to the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The World Health Organization says the continent of 1.3 billion people is facing a severe shortage of vaccine at the same time a new wave of infections is rising across Africa. Vaccine shipments into Africa have ground to a "near halt," WHO said last week.

"It is extremely concerning and at times frustrating," said Africa CDC Director **Dr. John Nkengasong**, a Cameroonian virologist who is trying to ensure some of the world's poorest nations get a fair share of vaccines in a marketplace where they can't possibly compete.

The United States and Britain, in contrast, have fully vaccinated more than 40% of their populations, with higher rates for adults and high-risk people. Countries in Europe are near or past 20% coverage, and their citizens are starting to think about where their vaccine certificates might take them on their summer vacations. The US, France and Germany are even offering shots to youngsters, who are at very low risk of serious illness from COVID-19.

Inequality

Poorer countries had warned as far back as last year of this impending vaccine inequality, fearful that rich nations would hoard doses.

In an interview, Nkengasong called on the leaders of wealthy nations meeting this week at the G-7 summit to share spare vaccines — something the United States has already agreed to do — and avert a "moral catastrophe."

"I'd like to believe that the G-7 countries, most of them having kept excess doses of vaccines, want to be on the right side of history," Nkengasong said. "Distribute those vaccines. We need to actually see these vaccines, not just ... promises and goodwill."

Others are not so patient, nor so diplomatic. "People are dying. Time is against us. This IS INSANE," South African human rights lawyer Fatima Hasan, an activist for equal access to health care, wrote in a series of text messages.

The Biden administration made its first major move to ease the crisis last week, announcing it would share an initial batch of 25 million spare doses with desperate countries in South and Central America, Asia and Africa.

Nkengasong and his team were in contact with White House officials a day later, he said, with a list of countries where the 5 million doses earmarked for Africa could go to immediately.

Still, the US offer is only a "trickle" of what's needed, Hasan wrote.

Africa alone is facing a shortfall of around 700 million doses, even after taking into account those secured through WHO's vaccine program for poorer countries, COVAX, and a deal with Johnson & Johnson, which comes through in August, two long months away.

Uganda just released a batch of 3,000 vaccine doses in the capital, Kampala — a minuscule amount for a city of 2 million — to keep its program barely alive.

There and elsewhere, the fear is that the luck that somehow enabled parts of Africa to escape the worst of previous waves of COVID-19 infections and deaths might not hold this time.

"The first COVID was a joke, but this one is for real. It kills," said Danstan Nsamba, a taxi driver in Uganda who has lost numerous people he knew to the virus.

In Zimbabwe, Chipo Dzimba embarked on a quest for a vaccine after witnessing COVID-19 deaths in her community. She walked miles to a church mission hospital, where there were none, and miles again to a district hospital, where nurses also had nothing and told her to go to the region's main government hospital. That was too far away.

"I am giving up," Dzimba said. "I don't have the bus fare."

South African health workers faced similar disappointment when they crowded into a parking garage last month, hoping for vaccinations and ignoring in their desperation the social distancing protocols. Many came away without a shot.

Femada Shamam, who is in charge of a group of old-age homes in the South African city of Durban, has seen only around half of the 1,600 elderly and frail people she looks after vaccinated. It is six months, almost to the day, since Britain began the global vaccination drive.

"They do feel very despondent and they do feel let down," Shamam said of her unvaccinated residents, who are experiencing "high anxiety" as they hunker down in their sealed-off homes 18 months into the outbreak. Twenty-two of her residents have died of COVID-19.

Also:

GENEVA: One of the world's largest foundations will spend \$1.3 billion over the next three years to acquire and deliver COVID-19 vaccines for more than 50 million people in Africa. It's a first-of-its-kind effort for a Western nonprofit to bolster Africa's lagging vaccination campaign amid widespread fears of a third wave of infections on the continent.

The Tuesday announcement from the Toronto-based Mastercard Foundation, which has more than \$39 billion in assets, comes days after the World Health Organization said Africa was encountering an alarming mix of a spike in virus cases and "a near halt" of vaccine shipments. The delays have been tied to India's halt on vaccine exports, among other things.

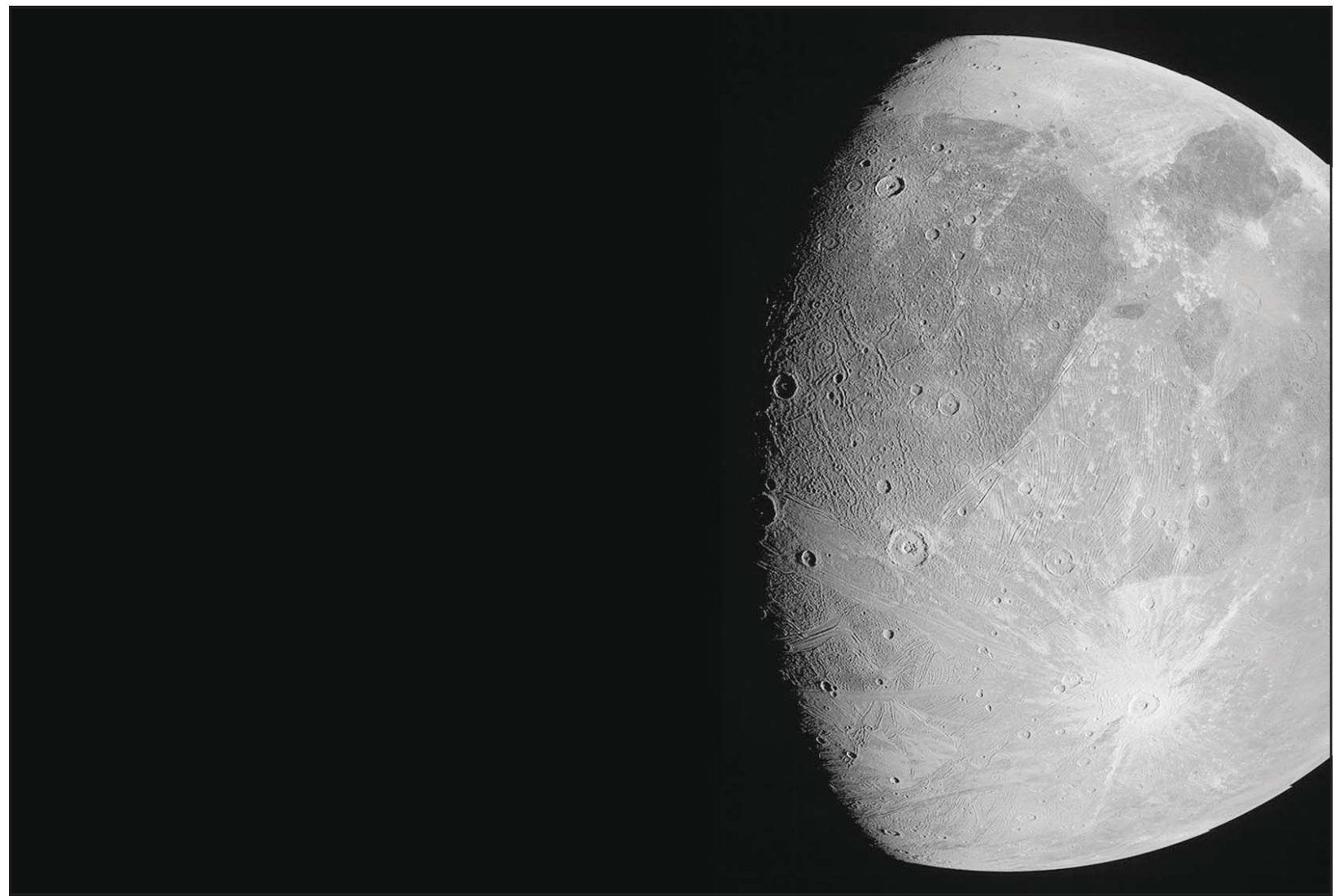
The foundation will purchase single-dose Johnson & Johnson vaccines at the discounted rate negotiated by the African Union during its 220 million dose deal with the vaccine manufacturer. Those vaccines will begin to be delivered to the AU's 55 member states from July to September, with an option to purchase an additional 180 million doses through next year.

But some countries have been experiencing issues with the J&J vaccine. In South Africa, the first batch of 1.1 million doses, which should have already been put to use, remain on hold at a plant because of contamination concerns at a factory in Baltimore. Another batch of 900,000 doses was meant to be released in June.

Dr. John Nkengasong, the director of the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said at a Tuesday press conference that he remains "positive and optimistic that the findings from the manufacturing site in the US will be resolved soon," and there will be more clarity by the end of this week.



Nkengasong



This June 7, 2021 image made available by NASA shows the Jovian moon Ganymede as the Juno spacecraft flies by. 'This is the closest any spacecraft has come to this mammoth moon in a generation,' said Juno's lead scientist, Scott Bolton of the Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio. (AP)

Spacecraft buzzes Jupiter's mega moon, 1st close-up in years

NASA's Juno spacecraft has provided the first close-ups of Jupiter's largest moon in two decades.

Juno zoomed past icy Ganymede on Monday, passing within 645 miles (1,038 kilometers). The last time a spacecraft came that close was in 2000 when NASA's Galileo spacecraft swept past our solar system's biggest moon.

NASA released Juno's first two pictures Tues-

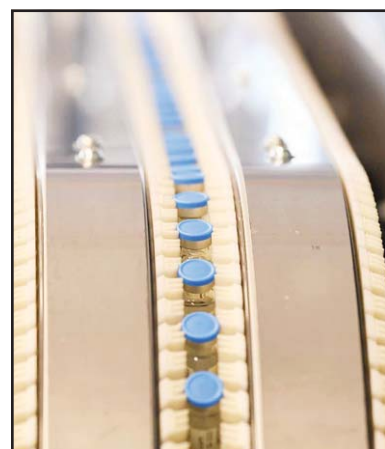
day, highlighting Ganymede's craters and long, narrow features possibly related to tectonic faults. One shows the moon's far side, opposite the sun.

"This is the closest any spacecraft has come to this mammoth moon in a generation," said Juno's lead scientist, Scott Bolton of the Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio. "We are going to take our time before we draw any scientific conclu-

sions, but until then we can simply marvel at this celestial wonder - the only moon in our solar system bigger than the planet Mercury."

Ganymede is one of 79 known moons around Jupiter, a gas giant. Italian astronomer Galileo Galilei discovered Ganymede in 1610, along with Jupiter's three next-biggest moons.

Launched a decade ago, Juno has been orbiting Jupiter for five years. (AP)



Vials of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine move on a conveyor belt at ASPEN Pharmaceuticals in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, March 29, 2021. The World Health Organization says the continent of 1.3 billion people is facing a severe shortage of vaccine at the same time a new wave of infections is rising across Africa. (AP)

Discovery

'Next gen will be victims': German Chancellor **Angela Merkel** on Tuesday warned against failure of the international community in attaining the UN Vision 2030 on sustainable development and climatic change.

Merkel, addressed a virtual conference organized by the German Council for Sustainable Development, warned that failure of attaining objectives of the initiative, launched by the UN 2015, would result in enormous difficulties for the next generations.

Current efforts for coping with effects of the climatic change are insufficient, Merkel said.

There are clear hurdles on the path toward attaining objectives of the vision, particularly at the levels of consumption of energy and other products, transports and the green-house emissions, Merkel said.

The council was established in Germany in 2001 against the backdrop of the 1992 agreement among 178 states at a UN sponsored conference in Rio de Janeiro on a program to cope with climatic changes in the 21st century. (KUNA)

'Flower should be protected': An extremely rare wildflower that grows only in Nevada's high desert where an Australian mining company wants to dig for lithium should be protected under the Endangered Species Act, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has said.

The agency outlined its intention to propose listing Tiehm's buckwheat as a threatened or endangered species as part of its belated, 12-month review of a listing petition conservationists filed in 2019. A federal judge said last month the finding was six months overdue and ordered the agency to render a decision within weeks.

The conclusion announced that federal protection is warranted could jeopardize Loneer Ltd's plans to build the mine halfway between Reno and Las Vegas.

It also ups the ante in an early test of the Biden administration's ability to make good on promises to protect public lands and their native species while at the same time pursuing an ambitious clean energy agenda that includes bolstering production of lithium needed for electric car batteries.

Environmentalists say the delicate, 6-inch (15-centimeter) tall wildflower with yellow blooms is on the brink of extinction with fewer than 30,000 individual plants remaining.

"Tiehm's buckwheat shouldn't be wiped off the face of the earth by an open mine," **Patrick Donnelly**, the center's Nevada director, said. (AP)

Greenpeace wins case: Australia's

Coronavirus

Enrollment of children as young as 6 months soon

Kids 5 and up get shots in tests

NEW ORLEANS, June 9, (AP): Seven-year-old Russell Bright squeezed his dad's hand tightly as tests of Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine started Monday in Louisiana for children ages 5 through 11.

Children held stuffed animals, played under chairs and a few cried at Ochsner Medical Center, just outside New Orleans. Their temperature and blood pressure were checked, their noses swabbed and their blood drawn for tests. Finally, they got a shot of either the vaccine or a placebo.

Ochsner is among 98 facilities in 26 states, the District of Columbia, Finland, Poland and Spain where the tests are taking place or planned.

Families won't know for six months whether their children actually were vaccinated. At that point, children who didn't get the vaccine will have the chance to do so.

The Pfizer vaccine was approved May 10 for children aged 12-15.

Adam Bright, whose younger son Tucker, 5, also is participating, said it was worth the chance to be a part of the trial.

"I want to do my part and have my kids do their part," he said. "Both me and my wife are already vaccinated, and so the sooner I can get them vaccinated and to feel comfortable being outside, not having to wear a mask, I thought the easiest way to get it is to go through the trial."

Russell, wearing a Spiderman mask, said he longs for a summer vacation that can include the water park or a longer trip - and then school without masks and social distancing.

"I'm looking forward to seeing my friends more and not wearing masks," he said. "You can't see if I'm making a frown or a smile. I don't like to wear them."

Five-year-old Kalil Chaudhry-Halperin held a stuffed toy Bruni — the lizard-like fire spirit in the movie Frozen 2 — as he waited at Ochsner.

He was shy and a bit nervous, but his dad, Jason Halperin, says Kalil was excited, because he knows his parents and his 12-year-old sister have all been vaccinated.

"You know how much we've all been through, our entire community, but now we have safe, effective, life-saving vaccines, and it not only helps him but the entire community and anyone vulnerable around our family," Jason Halperin said. "That's a great lesson to impart to our children."

Adam Bright said he's confident the Pfizer vaccine is safe, especially after seeing how smoothly vaccinations seem to be going for the next age group up.

Russell said he hopes that if and when the vaccine is cleared for emergency use for kids his age, they'll take advantage of the chance.

GENEVA, June 9, (AP): A top World Health Organization official estimated Monday that COVID-19 vaccination coverage of at least 80% is needed to significantly lower the risk that "imported" coronavirus cases like those linked to new variants could spawn a cluster or a wider outbreak.

Dr. Michael Ryan, WHO's emergencies chief, told a news conference that ultimately, "high levels of vaccination coverage are the way out of this pandemic."

Many rich countries have been moving to vaccinate teenagers and children - who have lower risk of more dangerous cases of COVID-19 than the elderly or people with comorbidities - even as those same countries face pressure to share vaccines with poorer ones that lack them.

Britain, which has vastly reduced case counts thanks to an aggressive vaccination campaign, has seen a recent uptick in cases attributed largely to the so-called delta variant that originally appeared in India - a former British colony.

Ryan acknowledged that data wasn't fully clear about the what percentage of vaccination coverage was necessary to fully have an impact on transmission.

"But ... it's certainly north of 80% coverage to be in a position where you could be significantly affecting the risk of an imported case potentially generating secondary cases or causing a cluster or an outbreak," he said.

"So it does require quite high levels of vaccination, particularly in the context of more transmissible variants, to be on the safe side," Ryan added.

Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead on COVID-19, noted the delta variant is spreading in more than 60 countries, and is more transmissible than the alpha

"Be brave and do it," he said. Pfizer says it is expanding testing of its COVID-19 vaccine in children younger than 12.

After a first-step study in a small number of young children to test different doses, Pfizer is ready to enroll about 4,500 young volunteers at more than 90 sites in the US, Finland, Poland and Spain.

The vaccine made by Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech already is

variant, which first emerged in Britain.

She cited "worrying trends of increased transmissibility, increased social mixing, relaxing of public health and social measures, and uneven and inequitable vaccine distribution around the world."

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, meanwhile, called on leaders of the developed Group of Seven countries to help the UN-backed vaccination program against COVID-19 to boost access to doses in the developing world.

With G-7 leaders set to meet in England later this week, Tedros said they could help meet his target that at least 10% of the populations in every country are vaccinated by the end of September - and 30% by year-end.

"To reach these targets, we need an additional 250 million doses by September, and we need hundreds of million doses just in June and July," he said, alluding to the summit involving Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States.

"These seven nations have the power to meet these targets. I'm calling on the G-7 not just to commit to sharing those, but to commit to sharing them in June and July."

At a time of continued tight supply of vaccines, Tedros also called on manufacturers to give the "first right of refusal" on new vaccine volumes to the UN-backed COVAX program, or to commit half of their volumes to COVAX this year.

He warned of a "two-track pandemic," with mortality among older age groups declining in countries with higher vaccination rates even as rates have risen in the Americas, Africa and the Western Pacific region.

authorized for emergency use in anyone 12 and older in the US and European Union.

Enrollment of 5- to 11-year-olds began this week. Those youngsters will receive two vaccine doses of 10 micrograms each — a third of the teen and adult dose — or dummy shots. Enrollment of children as young as 6 months will start in a few weeks using an even lower dose, 3 micrograms per shot.



Donnelly



Merkel

largest electricity generator on Tuesday largely lost its court case alleging that the environmental group Greenpeace had breached copyright and trademark laws by using its logo in a campaign that described the company as the nation's "biggest climate polluter."

Justice Stephen Burley ruled that AGL Energy had failed in its trademark infringement claim and failed in its copyright infringement claim for all of the uses

of the logo except for three social media posts as well as some photographs and placards.

Burley denied AGL's request for damages. Greenpeace had argued the Federal Court case had significant implications for charities and advocacy groups. Greenpeace also described AGL as the latest fossil fuel corporation to seek to stifle dissent through litigation. (AP)