



**South Korea**

## Doctors in South Korea call for flu vaccinations to be paused after 25 deaths

**Authorities say programme will continue after finding no direct links between the deaths and the vaccines**

*Reuters in Seoul*

Thu 22 Oct 2020 12.29 BST



7,000

South Korean officials refused on Thursday to suspend a seasonal influenza inoculation effort, despite growing calls for a halt, including an appeal from a key group of doctors, after the deaths of at least 25 of those vaccinated. Health authorities said they found no direct links between the deaths and the vaccines.

At least 22 of the dead, including a 17-year-old boy, were part of a campaign to inoculate 19 million teenagers and senior citizens for free, the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (KDCA) said.

“The number of deaths has increased, but our team sees low possibility that the deaths resulted from the shots,” the agency’s director, Jeong Eun-kyeong, told parliament.

South Korea ordered a fifth more flu vaccines this year to ward off what it calls a “twindemic”, or the prospect that people with flu develop coronavirus complications and overburden hospitals in winter.

“I understand and regret that people are concerned about the vaccine,” said health minister Park Neung-hoo, who confirmed the free programme would carry on.

“We’re looking into the causes but will again thoroughly examine the entire process in which various government agencies are involved, from production to distribution.”

Vaccine providers include domestic firms such as GC Pharma, SK Bioscience, Korea Vaccine and Boryung Biopharma Co Ltd, a unit of Boryung Pharm Co Ltd, along with France’s Sanofi.

They supply both the free programme and paid services that together aim to vaccinate about 30 million people of a population of 52 million.

Of the 25 dead, 10 received products from SK Bioscience, five each from Boryung and GC Pharma, one from Korea Vaccine and four from Sanofi.

All four domestic firms declined to comment, while Sanofi did not immediately reply to requests for comment.

It was not immediately clear if any of the vaccines made in South Korea were exported, or if those supplied by Sanofi were also being used elsewhere.

The Korean Medical Association, an influential grouping of doctors, urged the government to temporarily halt all inoculation programmes to allay public concerns and ensure the vaccines were safe.

Kim Chong-in, leader of the main opposition People Power party, wanted the programme halted until the causes of the deaths were verified.

But health authorities have said a preliminary investigation into six deaths found no direct link to the vaccines, with no toxic substances uncovered.

KDCA data on Thursday showed at least seven of the nine people it investigated had underlying conditions.

The free programme has proved controversial since it began last month. The launch was suspended for three weeks after the discovery that about 5m doses were kept at room temperature rather than being refrigerated, as required.

Officials said 8.3 million people had been inoculated since the programme resumed on 13 October, with about 350 cases of adverse reactions reported.

A separate paid programme allows buyers to pick from a larger pool of firms that make free vaccines and others.

The most deaths in South Korea linked to previous seasonal flu vaccinations was six in 2005, the Yonhap news agency said. Officials have said comparisons to previous years are difficult, since more people are taking the vaccine this year.

Kim Myung-suk, 65, is among a growing number of South Koreans who decided to pay for a vaccine of their choice, despite being eligible for a free dose.

“Though just a few people died so far, the number is growing and that makes me uneasy,” she told Reuters in the capital, Seoul. “So I’m getting a shot somewhere else and will pay for it.”

---

## Since you’re here ...

... we have a small favour to ask. Millions are flocking to the Guardian for open, independent, quality news every day, and readers in 180 countries around the world now support us financially.

We believe everyone deserves access to information that’s grounded in science and truth, and analysis rooted in authority and integrity. That’s why we made a different choice: to keep our reporting open for all readers, regardless of where they live or what they can afford to pay. This means more people can be better informed, united, and inspired to take meaningful action.

In these perilous times, an independent, truth-seeking global news organisation like the Guardian is essential. We have no shareholders or billionaire owner, meaning our journalism is free from commercial and political bias - this makes us different. When it’s never been more pertinent, our independence allows us to fearlessly investigate, challenge and expose those in power.

Amid the various intersecting crises of 2020 - from Covid-19 to police brutality - the Guardian has not, and will never, sideline the climate emergency. We are determined to uphold our reputation for producing urgent, powerful, high-impact reporting on the environment that’s read by around the world.

We’ve made institutional progress too, working hard to live up to the climate promises we made in 2019. We no longer take advertising from fossil fuel companies, and we’re on course to achieve net zero emissions by 2030.

If there were ever a time to join us, it is now. Your funding powers our journalism, it protects our independence, and ensures we can remain open for all. You can support us through these challenging economic times and enable real-world impact.

Every contribution, however big or small, makes a real difference for our future. **Support the Guardian from as little as £1 - and it only takes a minute. Thank you.**

Support the Guardian →

Remind me in December



Topics

**South Korea**

Flu / Vaccines and immunisation / Health / Asia Pacific / Coronavirus / news



---

## Headlines