Sweden's vaccine coordinator: - It is now the seriousness begins

STOCKHOLM / OSLO (VG) The man who negotiates the vaccine doses on behalf of Norway, believes 1.2 million Norwegians can be vaccinated by March.

Av MARTHA CS HOLMES og NORA THORP BJØRNSTAD
Updated today 09:39
- These last weeks have been enormously exciting, because now it really happens! The vaccines seem to work, and it is now that the seriousness begins, says Richard Bergström eagerly from a hotel lobby in the Swedish capital.

For the Swedish vaccine coordinator, these are extremely hectic days. We are only weeks away from potentially being able to receive the first vaccine shipments in January when VG meets the globetrotting Swede in Stockholm, where he is on a business trip from Switzerland, where he lives daily.

Bergström negotiates vaccine purchase agreements for the EU, and is also the one who secures Norway vaccines: The purchases are made through a program that is reserved for EU member states, but all countries still deliver doses to Norway. This is done practically by Sweden buying these doses, and then reselling them to Norway.

Pfizer's vaccine candidate is closest to approval in the EU and Norway.

This vaccine is supplied in packs of 975 doses, all of which must be used within five days of being prepared for use. Therefore, all cities and towns that will receive them must have an effective progress plan ready for use. Bergström emphasizes that it is very important that all countries are ready to receive the vaccines when they arrive.

- There will be lots of vaccines in the first quarter, and everyone must prepare. It would be a scandal if vaccines were left unused.

Read more about how the Pfizer vaccine can be distributed in Norway with specially made freezer boxes here.
Approximately 2.5 million doses in the first quarter
In the first quarter of 2021, Bergström estimates that Norway will receive a total of approximately 2.5 million vaccine doses. Since the vaccines that are most relevant for approval must be given in two rounds, it will be enough to vaccinate 1,250,000 Norwegians by March next year, he says to VG.

But there are several different vaccines that can come, so it is difficult to know exactly, he points out. The agreement Norway has with the EU countries, through Sweden, is that we will receive one percent of each vaccine.

- It is one percent of each vaccine batch. After that, there will be one percent of the shipments either every quarter or month. But the first delivery will be to all countries at the same time, says the coordinator to VG.

No vaccine has yet been approved in the EU system, but two vaccines are in the final phase of the process: the candidates for Pfizer / BioNTech and Moderna.

Both have applied for conditional approval in Europe, and delivered their latest major data packages to the European Medicines Agency (EMA). The EMA has scheduled an extraordinary meeting for December 29 for Pfizer, and January 12 for Moderna, where they will make their recommendation. If the conclusion is positive, the EU Commission can make a decision within a few days, and the vaccine can then be rolled out in the EU and Norway.

Read all about vaccines and how they are approved in VG's vaccine special.
- Do you know for sure how much the first delivery from Pfizer will be?

- We have an agreement that has a certain volume for the first quarter, but we have not yet received an exact delivery form. Sweden will receive a couple of hundred thousand vaccines already in January and Norway a little less than that, due to the population, he says.

- **Must guard us all weekend**

Even though it is technically Sweden that secures the vaccine doses to Norway, they are delivered directly to FHI from the manufacturers, without going via Sweden, says Bergström. He says the job of negotiating vaccines is enormously exciting, but at the same time has a great seriousness about it, because it means a lot to people.
- It has been on the communication side. To make everyone understand that it is not about one vaccine, but many, because we have to protect ourselves. EU cooperation has gone fantastically well in this context, he says.

It is FHI that has been commissioned to make the overall national vaccine plan that the government adopts for Norway.

If the Pfizer vaccine, which can be difficult to distribute, is approved and arrives in Norway, the solution will be similar to the one we see in other countries, says chief physician Are Stuwitz Berg in FHI to VG.

- We also want a decentralized storage of the vaccines here with the help of the regional health authorities. We cannot say exactly where these cold stores will be. The municipalities will have the vaccine transported all the way, and when it arrives at the municipality there is no longer a need to store it in -70 freezers, but then the vaccine has a shelf life of only 5 days. We are now working to inform the municipalities in detail about this, he says.

There are six vaccine candidates Norway can access through the EU. Four of them are in the process of being approved, and two have come so far that they have submitted an application for a conditional approval on the European market.

*Click on each vaccine candidate to read more about them:*