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47 workers test positive for Covid in Uganda despite Chinese vaccine

47 Chinese workers test positive for coronavirus in Uganda despite receiving their country's vaccine

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By Keoni Everington, Taiwan News, Staff Writer

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(AP photo)

TAIPEI (Taiwan News) — Despite apparently being inoculated with China's vaunted coronavirus vaccines, 47 Chinese workers in Uganda have been diagnosed with the virus, raising questions about the efficacy of the China-made products.

Back in June, long before clinical trials had been completed (currently in Phase Three), two candidates by Sinopharm's subsidiary China National Biotec Group Company Limited (CNBG) and one by Sinovac Biotech SVA.O were given the green light to be injected into "essential workers" as part of an emergency use program that began that month. As of November, the experimental vaccines had been administered to one million people in China.

Among the primary groups targeted for the vaccine are Chinese citizens stationed overseas, including diplomats, students, and at least 56,000 construction workers from state-run enterprises, the latter having received the Sinopharm shots. In November, Reuters cited Sinopharm as boasting that none of its vaccine recipients who went abroad had been infected.

However, the Chinese Embassy in Uganda on Dec. 5 announced that an Indian company in Uganda reported 47 Chinese citizens working for the firm had tested positive for COVID-19. It stated the majority of the cases were asymptomatic, but "a minority" experienced symptoms of the virus, including fever, cough, fatigue, and diarrhea.

The embassy reminded overseas Chinese and Chinese-funded institutions in Uganda to take all necessary measures to prevent cluster infections. Given that overseas workers are one of the main groups that have been receiving the vaccines since June, the laborers in Uganda should have been vaccinated, reported Liberty Times.

The fact that 47 workers in one company tested positive for the virus and an undisclosed number exhibited symptoms casts doubts on the efficacy of the experimental Chinese vaccines. Although the Chinese biotech industry claims that large-scale vaccinations have been carried out in accordance with emergency use regulations and are safe and effective, experts point out that the very low "official" rate of coronavirus infections in China after May and lack of data on those vaccinated fail to support these assertions.

During an interview in August, Sinopharm Group Chairman Liu Jingzhen (劉敬楨) declared that Chinese-made vaccines will be available by the end of the year. He claimed that one dose would only cost a few hundred Chinese yuan and would be 100 percent effective; in comparison, efficacy rates of the candidates by Pfizer, Moderna, and Astra Zeneca in Phase Three trials are 95 percent, 94.5 percent, 70 percent, respectively.

As news reports begin to spread about the effectiveness of the three Western vaccines, five Chinese vaccine candidates have entered Phase Three human clinical trials. In response, China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, and Chinese epidemiologist Zhong Nanshan (鍾南山) have been trying to regain global attention by praising the efficacy of their domestically produced vaccines.

The latest outbreak among Chinese workers raises questions about both the ability of the Chinese vaccines to prevent transmission of the disease but also the development of symptoms.

Update: 12/10 5 p.m.

On Tuesday (Dec. 8), Chinese state-run mouthpiece the Global Times condemned the report from "pro-secessionists Taiwan media" as "hyping the failure of the Chinese vaccine." Speaking on the condition of anonymity, a member of the Chinese medical team in Uganda claimed that none of the migrant workers had been vaccinated before being infected.

The tabloid then cited an overseas Chinese worker for a state-run firm who refused to be named as purporting that "None of the infected workers had left Uganda during the pandemic and got vaccinated, and some had been there for over two years."

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