Kenya will next year start manufacturing Covid-19 vaccines locally in collaboration with unnamed pharmaceutical firms in a move aimed at easing supply hitches that have derailed mass inoculation.

Health Cabinet Secretary Mutahi Kagwe revealed in an internal vaccination blueprint that the country has started the process of building a filling plant for the Covid-19 vaccines.

A full-fledged vaccine manufacturing plant will be built by 2024, said Mr Kagwe. A fill and finish facility helps third parties put the vaccine from the main manufacturers into vials or syringes, sealing them and packaging them up for distribution.

Many manufacturers use third parties to fill and finish their vaccines and African countries like Senegal, Rwanda and South Africa are in talks with investors to start the production of coronavirus vaccines.

“To improve our vaccine supply security, the government has embarked on the local manufacture of Covid-19 vaccines starting with the establishment of a fill-and finish facility through strategic partnerships and technological transfer,” said Mr Kagwe in the National Covid-19 Vaccine Deployment Plan, 2021.

“We aim to start local production during the first quarter of 2022 and have a fully-fledged human vaccine manufacturing capability by 2024.”

Mr Kagwe said local production will help secure sufficient vaccines to boost countrywide inoculation programmes.

Kenya plans to vaccinate 26 million adult Kenyans by end of June next year and at least 10 million by Christmas this year.

It has been acquiring doses of vaccines from Pfizer and Johnson and Johnson to supplement the Astrazeneca vaccines.

Kenya would need to secure a partnership with a vaccine patent holder to manufacture Covid 19 vaccines.

By Brian Ngugi Daily Nation Kenya