Rwanda on Wednesday received the first batch of COVID-19 vaccines through the COVAX initiative which included 240,000 doses of the AstraZeneca-Oxford vaccine that arrived in Kigali in the morning and 102,960 doses of the Pfizer vaccine, also from the COVAX facility in the evening.

With each recipient receiving two doses for full protection, the AstraZeneca-Oxford and Pfizer vaccines will be used to vaccinate a total of 171,480 people identified as priority risk groups, including health personnel, those above 65 years old or with underlying health conditions, and other frontline workers.

“We are pleased to receive these first AstraZeneca and Pfizer vaccines through the COVAX initiative, and appreciate the partnerships with the UN Family, GAVI, funders as well as manufacturers that have made this possible. We will immediately roll out our prepared vaccination plan, which will see target risk groups across Rwanda receive their first of two vaccine doses. Our target is to vaccinate 30% of our population by the end of 2021, and 60% by the end of 2022”, underlined the Minister of Health Dr. Daniel Ngamije.

Dr Kasonde Mwinga, WHO Rwanda Country Representative said that, “Rwanda has responded to the COVID-19 outbreak with determination to suppress circulation of the virus and save lives. These doses of COVID-19 vaccine from the COVAX Facility represent an unprecedented global effort to have equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines.”

The vaccines were delivered by UNICEF on behalf of the COVAX Facility and according to Juliana Lindsey, UNICEF-Rwanda Country Representative, “The Ministry of Health and RBC have a plan to vaccinate frontline health workers and other vulnerable groups in Rwanda as part of the first wave of vaccinations. Children, women, and men all over the country can be confident that Rwanda has taken its first steps towards recovering from the pandemic.”

The Ministry of Health announces that on Thursday, the vaccines will be dispatched from the Rwanda Biomedical Center warehouse to District Hospitals and then on to all 508 health centres across Rwanda. Vaccination exercises will take place on Friday in hospitals and health centres, and vaccine recipients will be invited though their respective Districts.

Minister Ngamije cautioned that those vaccinated should continue to observe COVID prevention measures, including masks, physical distancing, avoiding crowded and

closed spaces, and hand hygiene.

The health minister also pointed out that the Government of Rwanda continues negotiations with multiple partners, including international organizations and other governments, to acquire additional vaccines that will cover more people in subsequent phases.