

NASA fuels moon rocket for 1st time in countdown rehearsal

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In this photo provided by NASA, NASA's Space Launch System rocket and Orion crew capsule are seen on the launch pad at Launch Complex 39B at the Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Fla., on Monday, June 20, 2022. NASA fueled the rocket for the first time on Monday and completed a countdown test despite a fuel line leak. Credit: NASA via AP

NASA fueled its huge moon rocket for the first time Monday and went ahead with a critical countdown test despite a fuel line leak.

This was NASA's fourth crack at the all-important dress rehearsal, the last major milestone before the [moon rocket](#)'s long-awaited launch debut.

The previous attempts in April were thwarted by a fuel leak, as well as stuck valves and other [technical issues](#).

Another leak—this time in an external fuel line—almost curtailed Monday's test at Kennedy Space Center. But NASA managers decided to do the countdown test anyway.

Launch director Charlie Blackwell-Thompson said they pushed ahead to see "how the team performed, how the hardware performed, and they both performed very well."

Engineers wanted to get all the way down to the 9-second mark—just short of engine firing—to validate all the systems and procedures. But it cut off at 29 seconds. NASA spokesman Derrol Nail said it wasn't immediately known why the countdown stopped.



This satellite image provided by Maxar Technologies shows NASA's Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and the Orion space capsule on the launch pad at Launch Complex 39B at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida on Saturday, June 18, 2022. Credit: Maxar Technologies via AP

Earlier, nearly 1 million gallons of super-cold liquid hydrogen and oxygen were loaded into the 322-foot (98-meter) rocket known as the Space Launch System, or SLS.

The testing delays have pushed the actual launch—with an empty Orion capsule flying around the moon and back—to the end of August at the earliest. This [test flight](#) is crucial before astronauts climb aboard.



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Blackwell-Thompson said it was too early to say what NASA's next step might be.

The second SLS flight, planned for 2024, would send a crew around the moon and back. The third mission—no earlier than 2025—would have astronauts actually landing on the moon.

Astronauts last walked on the moon in 1972 during NASA's Apollo program. The new program is named Artemis, Apollo's twin sister in

Greek mythology.

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