Norway's committee recommends dropping AstraZeneca, J&J jabs

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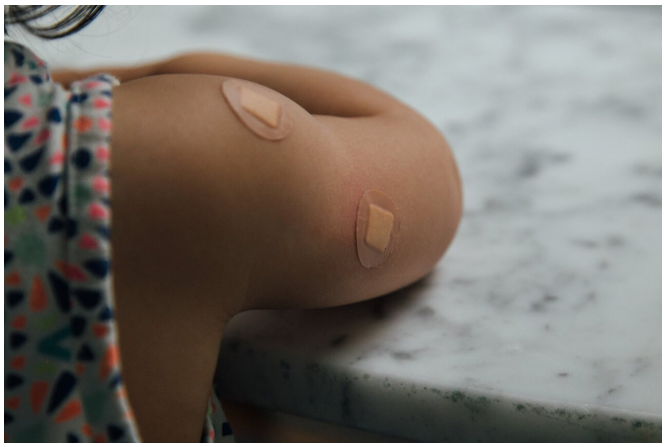

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An expert committee set up by Norway's government to evaluate AstraZeneca's and Johnson & Johnson's COVID-19 vaccines said on Monday that both should be abandoned over risks of rare but serious side effects.

In order to avoid a slowdown of the vaccine rollout the committee recommended that the two jabs should be made available for people on a voluntary basis.

The committee's head Lars Vorland said they did "not recommend the use of adenoviral vector vaccines in the national immunisation programme", as he handed in their report.

"This is of course because of the serious side effects" observed in a small proportion of people who have been injected with these vaccines, Vorland added.

Health Minister Bent Hoie has not yet made the government's position on the use of the vaccines known.

From the 134,000 injections of AstraZeneca's vaccine administered in Norway up until mid-March, five cases of severe thrombosis—three of them fatal—were reported in relatively young and previously healthy people. Another vaccine recipient died of a brain haemorrhage.

Norway suspended AstraZeneca's vaccine on March 11 while its rare but potentially serious side effects were studied in more detail.

On April 15, Norwegian health authorities recommended dropping the jab from the Anglo-Swedish drugmaker, but the government chose to first set up a committee of experts to examine the risks associated with the AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson vaccines—which are both based on the same adenovirus technology.

The European Medicines Agency and the World Health Organization both recommend continued use of the vaccines, arguing that the benefits far outweigh the associated risks.

US drugmaker Johnson & Johnson's vaccine has not yet been deployed in the country, but rare cases of thrombosis have been reported in the US.

Neighbouring Denmark is the only country in Europe that has officially dropped AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson's vaccines, but many have restricted the use of AstraZeneca's to certain age groups.