

Novartis could face S.Korea sales ban amid corruption allegations: media

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Swiss pharmaceutical giant Novartis risks seeing some of its medicines banned in South Korea after company executives were charged with offering illegal discounts to doctors, the Financial Times reported Thursday.

According to the British business daily, South Korean prosecutors have asked the government to suspend the operations of Novartis Korea after six executives at the unit, including its president, were indicted for allegedly handing out \$2.4-million (2.1-million euros) in illegal rebates from 2011 to 2016, in a move that could see the sale of implicated medicines banned for up to six months.

Novartis told AFP in an email that it would "take time to review the details of the indictment thoroughly and consider our next steps."

"We have acknowledged and regret that certain associates in (South) Korea conducted small medical meetings and other scientific related activities through trade journals, in violation of our policies," it said.

"We have also acknowledged that some associates supported travel to overseas congresses for some healthcare practitioners in a way that did not fully comply with (industry) self-regulation standards," it added.

But Novartis said it rejected the accusation that company's leadership in South Korea had sanctioned such violations.

"Novartis does not tolerate misconduct and we are already implementing a remediation plan in Korea based on the findings from our own investigation," it said.

It stressed that it was "too early for us to comment on potential outcomes of this case."

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