EU agency says mRNA jabs 'promising' against India variant

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Coronavirus vaccines using mRNA technology like Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna appear able to "neutralise" the variant of COVID-19 behind India's outbreak, the EU's drug watchdog said Wednesday.

There was "promising evidence" that such jabs could counter the

B.1.617 variant of COVID-19, first found in India in October and now in dozens of countries around the world, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) said.

"The data seems to be rather reassuring on the fact that at least the messenger RNA vaccines will be able to neutralise this variant, at least to an extent that will guarantee sufficient protection," Marco Cavaleri, the EMA's head of vaccine strategy, told a news conference.

The Amsterdam-based regulator was "monitoring very closely" the data emerging about the Indian variant, he added.

Cavaleri said the EMA also believed rival vaccines using viral vector technology would be effective but they were waiting for "real world data" from the use of a version of AstraZeneca's vaccine in India.

"So far overall we are pretty confident overall that the vaccines generally will be covering this variant," the Italian said.

The EU has currently authorised four vaccines: mRNA vaccines Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, and the viral vector vaccines AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson.

Messenger RNA genetic technology trains the body to reproduce spike proteins, similar to that found on the coronavirus. When exposed to the real virus later, the body recognises the spike proteins and is able to fight them off.

Viral vector vaccines like AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson use genetically-engineered version of a common-cold causing adenovirus as a "vector" to shuttle genetic instructions into human cells.

The viral vector vaccines have however been dogged by reports of rare

blood clots.

The EMA also has four vaccines under "rolling review" Russia's Sputnik V, China's Sinovac, US firm Novavax and Germany's CureVac.