

Cuba seeks WHO approval of its COVID-19 vaccines

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Cuba said Wednesday it would seek World Health Organization approval for two home-grown coronavirus vaccines it hopes to commercialize widely.

A vetting process will start Thursday with WHO experts examining the nation's Abdala and Soberana 02 jabs, said Rolando Perez of state pharma group BioCubaFarma.

Perez said the experts would examine the vaccines' "safety, immunogenicity (the ability of a [vaccine](#) to provoke an [immune response](#)) and efficacy."

The WHO's representative in Cuba, Jose Moya, told AFP there would be "a first virtual meeting" Thursday between experts in Havana, Geneva and Washington.

Cuba has been using domestically-produced vaccines in its COVID-19 inoculation campaign, including for children.

The vaccines, the first developed in Latin America, have yet to undergo international, scientific peer review.

They are based on recombinant protein technology—the same used by the United States' Novavax and France's Sanofi jabs.

Unlike many other shots in use, recombinant vaccines do not require extreme refrigeration.

Perez said Cuba's ability to sell its vaccines to other countries does not depend on WHO approval, as this is a decision for national health authorities.

But it would "facilitate (the vaccines') entry into the market in other nations, once the island's needs are covered."

Several countries including Argentina and Mexico have shown interest in acquiring the Cuban jabs, Venezuela has already signed a purchase

contract, and Iran is producing Soberana 02 on home soil.

Under American sanctions since 1962, communist Cuba has a long tradition of making its own vaccines, dating back to the 1980s.

Nearly 80 percent of its inoculations are produced locally.

Cuban scientists say the Abdala and Soberana 02 jabs have been shown to be more than 90 percent effective at preventing symptomatic COVID-19 cases.

The island of 11.2 million people has fully vaccinated about 38.5 percent of its population, also using China's Sinopharm inoculation.

The country has registered 768,497 COVID cases and 6,523 deaths.

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