EU considers booster doses of J&J's COVID-19 vaccine

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A woman from Russia is administered a dose of the Johnson COVID-19 vaccine in Zagreb, Croatia, Tuesday, Nov. 9, 2021. Despite its infection surge, Croatia is becoming a new favored destination for Russians seeking vaccination with Western jabs, which they need to travel around Europe and the U.S. Credit: AP Photo/Darko Bandic

The European Medicines Agency says it is evaluating whether to authorize booster doses of Johnson & Johnson's single-shot COVID-19 vaccine.

In a statement Monday, the EU drug regulator said it was considering an application from J&J to recommend booster doses of the J&J vaccine for adults 18 and over, at least two months after they were first immunized. Amid an explosive surge of new coronavirus infections across Europe, the EMA said it expected to make a decision on this within weeks.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration gave the green light to J&J booster doses in October, both for people who initially received the J&J and vaccine and for people who got immunized with other vaccines.

J&J earlier presented results from a large study that found giving a second dose just two months after the first bumped protection against symptomatic COVID-19 to 94% from 70% in U.S. recipients. Giving that booster six months later instead prompted an even bigger jump in virus-fighting antibodies.

EU countries initially ordered about 200 million doses of J&J's vaccine, but only a fraction have been delivered after the company has faced repeated production problems.

The EMA has previously said its 27 nations could consider administering booster doses of vaccines made by Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna for people who had received the two-dose regimens at least six months before, noting that a third shot would provide additional antibodies against COVID-19. The agency is expected to decide later this week on COVID-19 vaccines for children aged 5 to 11.