Italy bans batch of AstraZeneca jab but plays down risks

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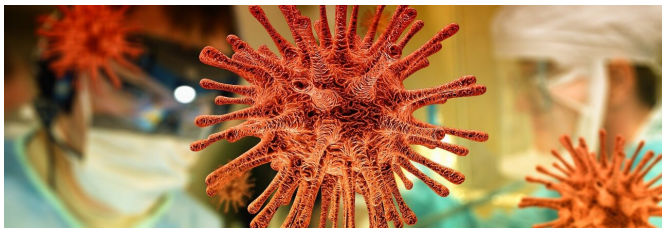

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Italy's medicines regulator on Thursday banned the use of a batch of AstraZeneca/Oxford coronavirus vaccine as a precaution, after fears of a link to blood clots sparked suspensions across Europe.

But the regulator said there was currently no established link between the vaccine and the alleged side-effects—a position reinforced by Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi's office.

Draghi's spokesman said that in a phone call with European Commission chief Ursula Von Der Leyen, "it emerged that there is no evidence of a link between the cases of thrombosis in Europe and the administration of the AstraZeneca vaccine".

"President Von Der Leyen reported that the European Medicines Agency had initiated a further accelerated review."

In a statement, Italian regulator AIFA said: "Following the reporting of some serious adverse events... AIFA has decided, as a precaution, to issue a ban on the use of this batch throughout the national territory."

It said it "reserves the right to take further measures, if necessary," in coordination with the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

The batch mentioned by the Italian regulator, ABV2856, is different to that suspended by Austria on Monday, which the EMA named as ABV5300.

On Monday, Austria announced it had suspended the use of the particular AstraZeneca batch, after a 49-year-old nurse died of severe blood coagulation days after receiving the shot.

Other countries followed suit, while Denmark, Norway and Iceland on Thursday went further, suspending entirely the use of AstraZeneca's vaccine.

The EMA said Thursday there had been 30 cases of 'thromboembolic events' among five million people who have had the jab so far in Europe.

However the EMA added there is no indication that the vaccine caused these conditions and that the AstraZeneca jab could continue to be used pending the results of a probe.