

Cuba begins testing 2nd COVID-19 vaccine on health care workers

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Cuba began vaccinating tens of thousands of health care workers with a second COVID-19 vaccine on Monday, even though it has yet to complete clinical trials.

Last week, Cuba started vaccinating 150,000 [health care workers](#) with its Soberana 2 vaccine that is still in the third phase of [clinical trials](#).

And on Monday, the island nation started giving its Abdala vaccine to 124,000 health care workers—Abdala is likewise still in phase 3 of COVID vaccine trials.

Cuba is also working on two other vaccines—Mambisa and Soberana 1—that are respectively still in phase 1 and phase 2.

"The controlled [intervention study](#) with the Abdala vaccine was approved by the Cuban regulatory agency on Saturday 27 March and today, Monday, we began vaccinating," Rolando Perez, the director of science and innovation at state pharmaceutical company BioCubaFarma, said on state television.

Cubans aged between 19 and 80 "with a high risk" of being infected are participating in the intervention study while another 48,000 volunteers are taking part in the parallel phase 3 [clinical study](#) for Abdala.

A third intervention study, also using Soberana 2, aims to vaccinate 1.7 million inhabitants of the capital Havana, including athletes that have qualified for the Tokyo Olympic Games that begin in July.

The two Soberana 2 initiatives are due to be completed by May.

Unlike regular clinical tests, intervention studies do not use a [placebo group](#).

Cuba's government plans to begin its formal vaccination program in June, at which time it hopes to have the first authorized vaccine developed and produced in Latin America.

Perez said BioCubaFarma is planning on conducting clinical trials on children as young as five from April.

Cuba has been forced to develop its own vaccines since the 1980s due to difficulties imposed by US sanctions that began in 1962.

Eight of the 11 vaccines in its immunization program are produced locally.

The country of 11.2 million has been relatively unscathed by the coronavirus pandemic, recording 73,000 cases and just 417 deaths.

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