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At Least Four European Countries Limit Use of Moderna Vaccine in People Below 30, Citing Cardiovascular Side Effects

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Denmark, Norway, Sweden and now Finland have recommended against the use of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine for younger people, a move prompted by cardiovascular side effects that though rare, have caused concerns among health authorities in those countries.

Finland's Institute of Health said Thursday it would pause use of the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine among men under the age of 30. Swedish regulators took similar steps Wednesday, according to the Wall Street Journal. Also on Wednesday, Denmark said it would not offer the Moderna vaccine to people under 18 as a precautionary measure.

Similarly to Denmark, Norway announced that people under 18 should not take the Moderna vaccine even if they had already taken the first shot. Norway also recommended that men under 30 take the Pfizer Covid-19 vaccine instead of the Moderna drug, citing U.S. and Canadian data along with research from Nordic countries. The data point to inflammatory heart conditions called myocarditis and pericarditis that occur in very rare cases after Covid-19 vaccination from either Moderna or Pfizer. Leaders are recommending against Moderna in the aforementioned age groups because the rare conditions occur more often with that drug, though both vaccines use the mRNA technology.

In response to the countries' decisions, Moderna issued a statement acknowledging the actions, but added that the adverse reactions were rare. "The very rare occurrence of myocarditis and/or pericarditis following administration of mRNA vaccines against Covid-19...These are typically mild cases and individuals tend to recover within a short time following standard treatment and rest," the spokesman said (via WSJ). Additionally, the Moderna spokesman said Covid-19 itself causes myocarditis, and that vaccination "is the best way to protect against it."

According to the European Medicine Agency, the rare occurrences took place more often after the second dose of either vaccine, and in younger men. The EMA said its safety committee "will assess the new data to determine whether there is a need to update the current advice in the product information for the vaccines."

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention panel advisers in June said there was a "likely association" between the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines and very rare inflammatory heart conditions in some younger people who received them, but that most patients recovered quickly, according to WSJ.

The actions come after a recommendation by Ontario health regulators in late September that young people ages 12 to 24 receive the Pfizer vaccine instead of Moderna's. The advice was based on an increased number of reports of pericarditis and myocarditis following vaccination with the Moderna drug.