

Prognosis

Pfizer Shot Halts Severe Illness in Israel as Delta Spreads

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- ▶ Effectiveness against transmission of virus declines
 - ▶ Israel lifted all Covid restrictions at the start of June
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Covid-19 Delta Variant Explained

Pfizer Inc.'s vaccine was less effective at keeping people from getting the coronavirus in Israel in recent weeks, but it continues to provide a strong shield against severe Covid-19, according to government data.

The vaccine protected 64% of people against the illness between June 6 and early July, down from a previous 94%. The drop was observed as the delta variant was spreading in Israel, the Health Ministry said. It also coincided with the lifting of virus restrictions at the start of June.

Despite the indications of increased infections, the data also showed the shot is protecting people from severe illness. Its effectiveness at preventing hospitalization fell to 93%, according to

the Health Ministry, compared with at least 97% in an earlier government study.

Delta, which first emerged in India, is spreading around the globe as governments race to inoculate people. The mutation has forced some countries to delay or rethink plans to loosen curbs on businesses, activity and travel.



Pfizer spokeswoman Dervila Keane declined to comment on the data from Israel. She pointed to research showing the vaccine's continued protection against new mutations -- just slightly reduced in some cases. The evidence so far suggests that the vaccine "will continue to protect against these variants," she said.

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Israel had one of the world's most effective coronavirus inoculation drives. About 57% of the population is now fully vaccinated.

Many new Covid-19 cases are among vaccinated people, according to Ynet news service. Last Friday, 55% of the newly infected had been vaccinated, the website said. As of July 4, there were 35 serious cases of coronavirus out of a population of 9.3 million, compared with 21 on June 19.

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The government plans to study vaccinated individuals who contracted the coronavirus, including factors such as age, pre-existing conditions and inoculation dates, in order to evaluate the efficacy of the vaccine and the rate at which it wears off, the prime minister's office said.

The government is considering reinstating additional restrictions after restoring a mandate to wear masks indoors in public spaces. No decision has been on recommending a third dose of vaccine, the health ministry said.

Pfizer Chief Executive Officer Albert Bourla has said people will likely need a third dose within 12 months of getting fully protected.

(Updates with government release in second paragraph, planned study in eighth)

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