

Vaccine 'milestone' hailed as global COVID cases soar (Update)

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An effective vaccine is seen as the best hope to break the cycle of deadly virus surges followed by severe restrictions

One of the teams racing to develop a coronavirus vaccine announced Monday its drug had shown 90 percent effectiveness, sending markets

soaring and raising hopes of an end to the worst pandemic in a century.

US pharmaceutical giant Pfizer said tests involving more than 40,000 people had provided results that were a "critical milestone" in the search for a vaccine, as global infections soared past 50 million—including an alarming 10 million now in the United States alone.

Stock markets had already jumped after Democrat Joe Biden was called as the winner of the US presidential election on the weekend. They accelerated rapidly on the vaccine news, with the Dow Jones Industrial Average up three percent at Monday's close of trade.

An effective vaccine is seen as the best hope to break the cycle of deadly virus surges followed by severe restrictions across much of the world since COVID-19 first emerged in China late last year.

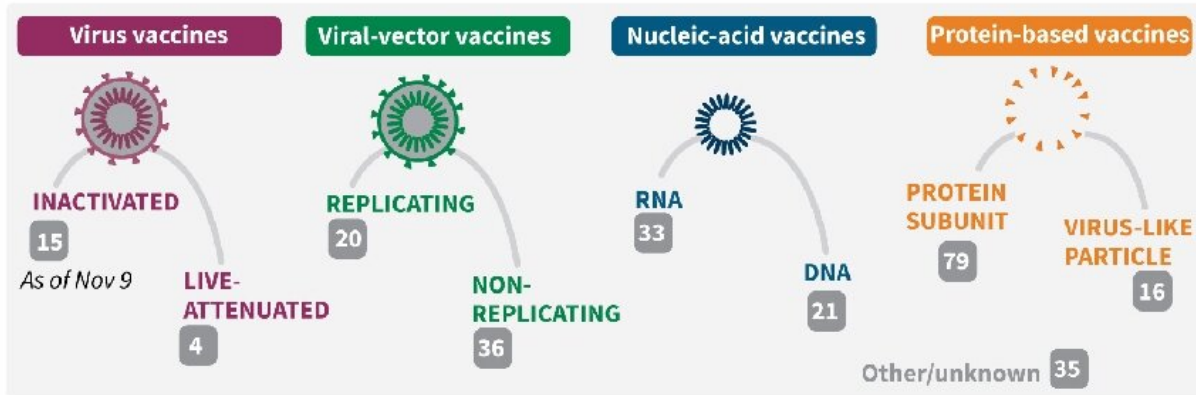
Tens of millions of people in Europe are living under lockdowns preventing them from leaving their homes, and millions of business owners are enduring forced closures.

'Much-needed breakthrough'

Curbs on daily life have shredded the global economy but politicians have had few other tools to protect vulnerable populations.

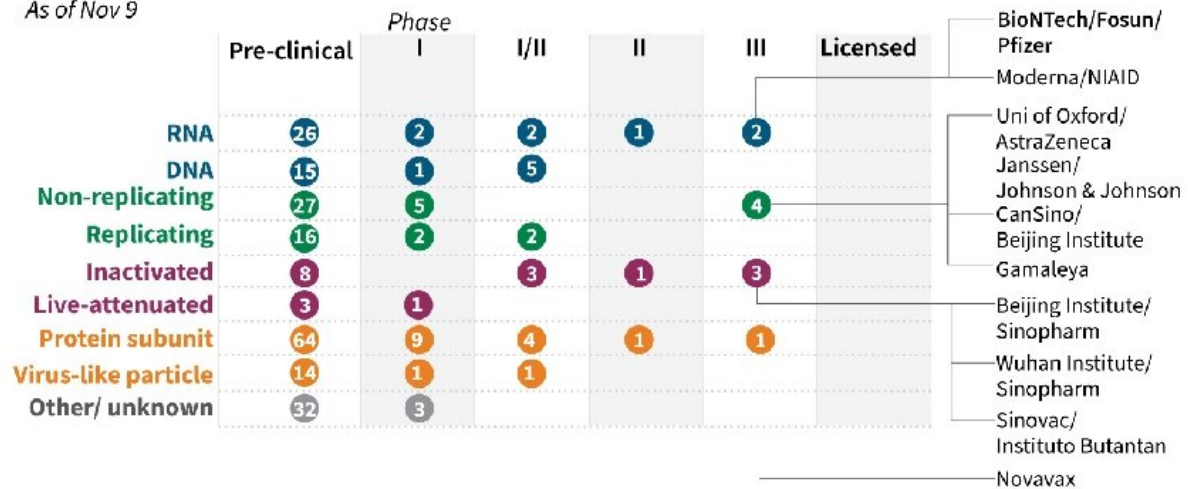
Race for a Covid-19 vaccine

There are currently 259 vaccine candidates being tracked by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine




Development stages

As of Nov 9



Phases explained

Pre-clinical	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Licensed
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Antigen discovery Vaccine formulation Animal testing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First human trials on small number of volunteers (10 - 100) Checks for safety, strength of immune response, optimal dose 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Larger human group (100 - 1,000) Focus on safety Strength of immune response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large scale (1,000 - 10,000+) Effectiveness of immune response Safety on larger, more varied population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large-scale manufacture Ongoing monitoring for safety and effectiveness

AFP  Source: Vaccine pipeline/Nature journal

Race for a Covid-19 vaccine

"We are a significant step closer to providing people around the world with a much-needed breakthrough to help bring an end to this global health crisis," Pfizer chairman Albert Bourla said in a statement.

The drug, being developed jointly with German firm BioNTech, is one of more than 40 candidate vaccines, but no other has yet made similar claims about its effectiveness.

The companies said they could pass the final hurdles for a US rollout later this month, and could supply up to 50 million doses globally this year and up to 1.3 billion next year.

The scientific community reacted positively, with top US expert Anthony Fauci describing the results as "extraordinary."

World Health Organization director Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed the news as "encouraging" shortly after warning that the world "might be tired of COVID-19. But it is not tired of us."

But others pointed out that no information had yet been disclosed about the ages of the participants in the trial.

"If a vaccine is to reduce severe disease and death, and thus enable the population at large to return to their normal day-to-day lives, it will need to be effective in older and elderly members of our society," said Eleanor Riley, professor of immunology and infectious diseases at the University of Edinburgh.



US President-elect Joe Biden has set up a coronavirus task force ahead of his inauguration on January 20, 2021

Biden task force

Outgoing US President Donald Trump was among the first to react, writing on Twitter: "STOCK MARKET UP BIG, VACCINE COMING SOON. REPORT 90% EFFECTIVE. SUCH GREAT NEWS!"

He later claimed on Twitter that news of progress on a vaccine had been delayed until after the election to damage him.

The US Food and Drug Administration also reached a breakthrough

Monday, granting emergency approval to a synthetic antibody treatment against COVID-19 developed by Eli Lilly.

Bamlanivimab, which was shown to reduce the risk of hospitalization and emergency room visits, is the first major drug to be approved that was designed specifically against the new coronavirus.

American voters handed victory to Biden in part because Trump failed to rein in the epidemic—often refusing to back restrictive measures or even wear a mask in public and repeatedly undermining his own experts.

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