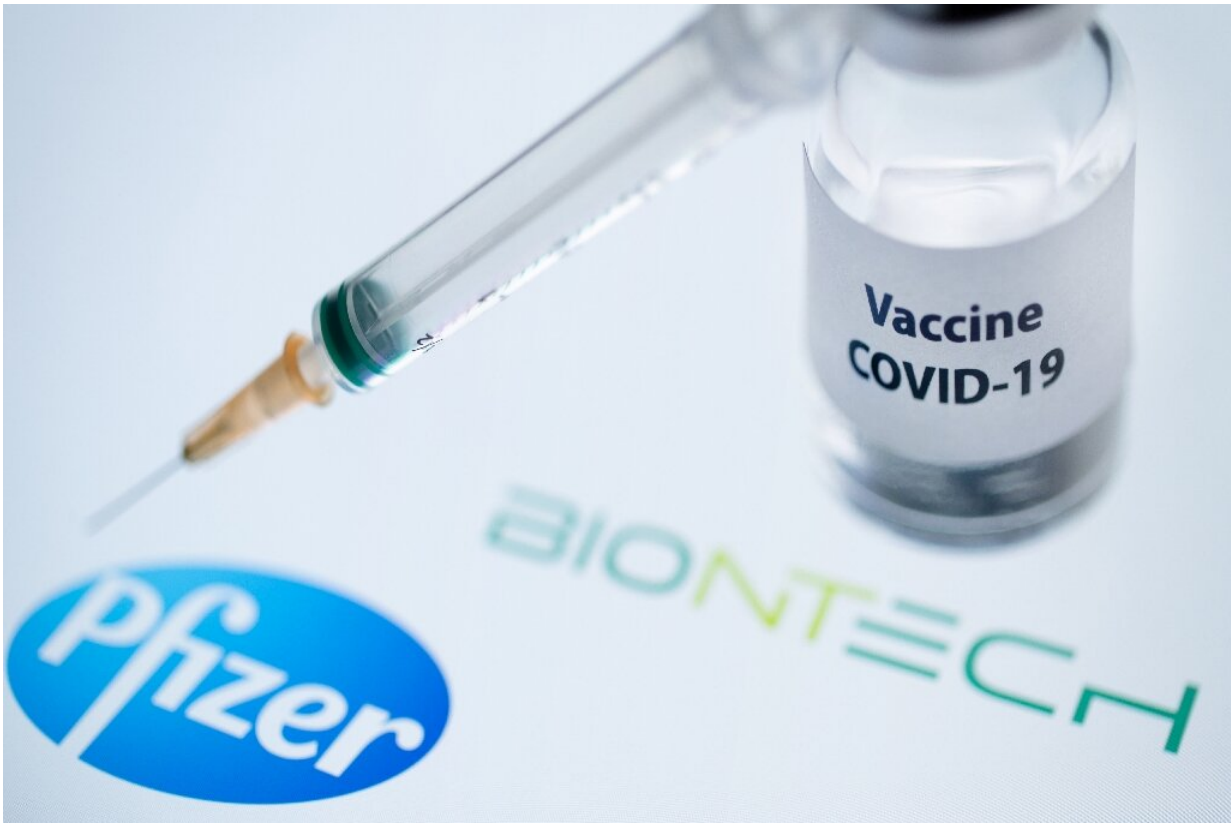


EU plans vaccines as regulator sets approval deadline

December 1 2020, by Erin Conroy



Europeans could begin receiving the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine 'before the end of 2020', the companies said

European countries were on Tuesday given a clear timeframe for the start of their vaccination programmes after the bloc's medicines

regulator said it would decide by December 29 whether to grant emergency approval for the first COVID-19 jabs.

France plans to prioritise the most fragile and exposed groups in early 2021, followed by a second campaign for the rest of the population between April and June, President Emmanuel Macron announced.

Germany has already said it is hoping to launch its immunisation drive in the first quarter of 2021 and is preparing vaccination centres across the country.

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) on Tuesday said it would hold an extraordinary meeting on December 29 "at the latest" to consider emergency approval for a vaccine developed by Germany's BioNTech and US giant Pfizer.

Hopes that COVID shots could be ready for use by the end of this year received a boost when US firm Moderna said it was filing Monday for emergency authorisation of its vaccine in the United States and Europe.

The EMA said it would hold a separate meeting to assess that request by January 12 at the latest.

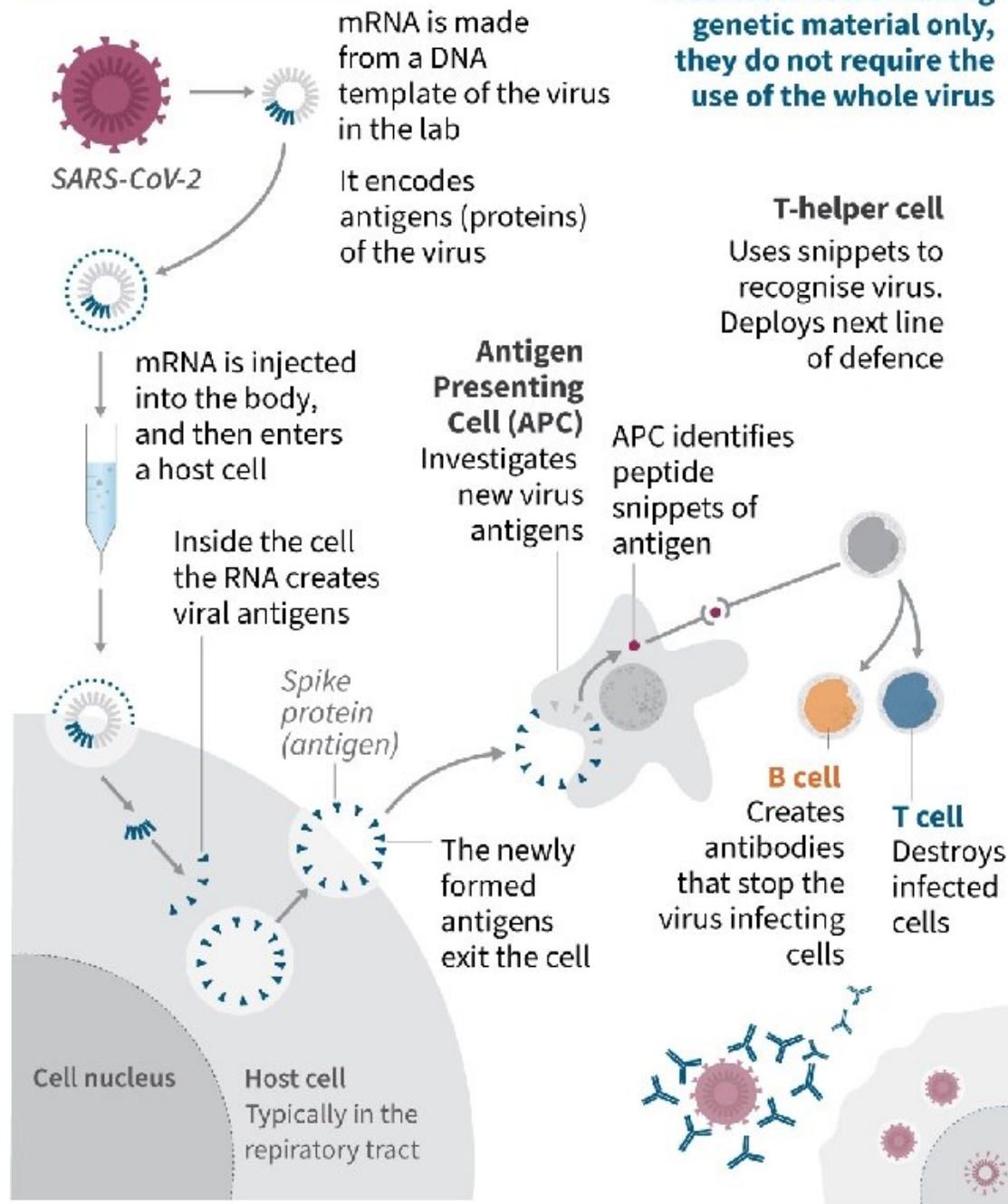
Large-scale trial data released last month showed that both vaccines were safe and around 95 percent effective against COVID-19.

European Commission spokesman Stefan de Keersmaecker told reporters that once the EMA gave regulatory permission, formal authorisation from Brussels would follow "very quickly", probably "in a matter of days".

Triggering immunity from genetic code

The Moderna vaccine is a **nucleic-acid* vaccine**. It uses lab-made SARS-CoV-2 messenger RNA (mRNA) to trigger an immune response

Nucleic-acid vaccines



*The cell's main information-carrying molecules, which direct protein production

Source: Vaccine pipeline/Nature journal/pfizer.co.uk/modernatx.com

Triggering immunity from genetic code

Companies have been racing to find a treatment for the coronavirus, which has killed almost 1.5 million people and infected over 63 million since it emerged in China in December last year.

Both the Moderna and BioNTech/Pfizer vaccines are based on the same new mRNA technology, with similar levels of effectiveness at around 95 percent.

The mRNA (messenger ribonucleic acid) is used to deliver genetic material to the body that makes human cells create a protein from the virus.

This trains the immune system to be ready to attack if it encounters SARS-CoV-2.

'On a knife's edge'

Spain announced Tuesday it would buy more than 50 million additional vaccine doses from three different labs, including Moderna's, bringing the total number it will acquire to 105 million.

The government said last month that it was in contract to buy more than 20 million doses of the BioNTech/Pfizer vaccine.

The country also inaugurated a huge new medical complex, built in just three months at a cost of nearly 100 million euros (\$120 million) to ease pressure on Madrid region hospitals that were overwhelmed during the

first wave.



The coronavirus means even more people in the world's poorest countries like Yemen are dependent on humanitarian aid

The OECD club of wealthy countries predicted Tuesday that with vaccines perhaps only weeks away from distribution, the world economy would bounce back to pre-pandemic levels by late 2021.

With anticipated global growth of around 4.2 percent next year, the world should make up almost all the output shortfall suffered in 2020, largely thanks to "massive policy support" from governments and central banks, OECD chief economist Laurence Boone said.

But while China and India are expected to leap ahead, the US, the eurozone and Japan are forecast to see only modest gains.

The United Nations warned that the pandemic would pitch tens of millions more people into desperate need next year, and said around \$35 billion in humanitarian aid was needed.

In its annual Global Humanitarian Overview published Tuesday, the UN said that the number of people in need of aid would grow 40 percent in 2021 compared with this year.

"The increase arises almost entirely because of COVID-19," UN emergency relief coordinator Mark Lowcock told reporters. The pandemic had tipped those "already living on a knife's edge" into need, said the report.

Three-tiered system

Ireland on Tuesday ended its second partial lockdown on Tuesday, in place since October 22.



Trump advisor Scott Atlas was well-known for remarks questioning coronavirus infection control measures

As cases are expected to mount as people mingle in the run-up to Christmas, "the challenge is to keep that increase as low as possible," Foreign Minister Simon Coveney told broadcaster RTE.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson faces a rebellion in his Conservative ranks over plans for a county-by-county tiered restriction system to replace an England-wide lockdown that ends at midnight.

MPs complain that some regions are being forced into the strictest infection control measures because of isolated clusters of cases.

A law making it compulsory to wear masks in indoor public spaces finally came into effect in the Netherlands on Tuesday, one of the last countries in Europe to impose the measure.

And in the US, media reported the resignation of Scott Atlas, President Donald Trump's controversial coronavirus adviser.

"Masks work? NO," Atlas had tweeted in October, calling the following month for people in Michigan to "rise up" against COVID-19 measures.

Twitter hid the message, classifying it as misinformation.

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