

Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine effective after first dose, but U.S. may face supply shortage

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(HealthDay)—New data released Tuesday suggests that Pfizer's two-dose coronavirus vaccine begins to work well protecting recipients against COVID-19 within 10 days of the first dose. It also appeared to work well regardless of the trial volunteers' age, sex or weight.

The data was published on the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's website in advance of a meeting of its vaccine advisory committee, *The New York Times* reported.

Last month, Pfizer presented data showing a 95% effectiveness of the vaccine after two doses, but the new data suggests protection arrives even after the first dose.

But will Americans who need the shot get one? In related news, Pfizer has already told the Trump administration it can't deliver additional doses of its coronavirus vaccine until summer because other countries have snatched up most of the company's supply.

That means the U.S. government may not be able to ramp up its vaccination campaign as quickly as it had hoped. Right now, 100 million doses of the Pfizer vaccine have been purchased, but whether most Americans can get the vaccine by late spring or early summer is no longer certain, the *Washington Post* reported.

Trump administration officials denied there would be availability issues in the second quarter, noting that other coronavirus vaccines are moving through the pipeline.

"I'm not concerned about our ability to buy vaccines to offer to all of the American public," Gen. Paul Ostrowski, who oversees logistics for Operation Warp Speed, told the *Post* Monday. "It's clear that Pfizer made plans with other countries. Many have been announced. We understand those pieces."

But several officials knowledgeable about the vaccine contracts said that vaccines from other countries may not fill the gap.

Last summer, Pfizer officials had urged Operation Warp Speed to purchase 200 million doses, according to people knowledgeable about the issue who spoke on the condition of anonymity, the *Post* reported. But Warp Speed officials declined, opting instead for 100 million doses, they said.

It was only last weekend, with U.S. Food and Drug Administration's emergency clearance of the Pfizer vaccine imminent, that federal officials asked to buy another 100 million doses from Pfizer. By then, the company said it had committed its supply elsewhere and it might only be able to provide 50 million doses at the end of the second quarter, and another 50 million doses in the third quarter, the *Post* reported.

Pfizer spokeswoman Amy Rose would not confirm any information about the company's discussions with the government, and said a separate agreement would have to be negotiated for any doses beyond the 100 million the United States has already purchased, the *Post* reported.

Moncef Slaoui, chief science adviser to Warp Speed, told the *Post* Monday that the government strategy was to spread its risk widely over many different types of vaccines from different companies. He declined to comment on negotiations with any particular company, but said he did not believe vaccine supply would fall off sharply at any point.

Slaoui did note that Johnson & Johnson was likely to report trial results in early January and be ready to ship doses in February, if its vaccine is authorized. He also predicted that AstraZeneca's trial would report results in late January or early February and potentially begin distributing doses later that month.

"We could have all of them," Slaoui told the *Post*. "And for this reason, we feel confident we could cover the needs without a specific cliff [drop in supply] ... We have planned things in such a way as we would indeed avoid a cliff."

The contract that Pfizer signed with the government in July included an option to contract to buy an additional 500 million doses. No agreements with Moderna beyond its initial contract have been announced, but the United States has the option to purchase 400 million additional doses of that [vaccine](#), the *Post* reported.

Biden Makes Top Health Official Picks

President-elect Joe Biden has picked California Attorney General Xavier Becerra to head the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and Harvard infectious diseases expert Dr. Rochelle Walensky to run the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

In Becerra, Biden puts a staunch defender of the Affordable Care Act in a leading role to carry out the administration's coronavirus response, the *Associated Press* reported.

If confirmed by the Senate, Becerra will be the first Latino to head the HHS, a \$1-trillion agency with 80,000 employees and a portfolio that includes drugs and vaccines, cutting-edge medical research and health insurance programs covering more than 130 million Americans, the *AP* said.

Biden's selection of Becerra was confirmed by two people familiar with the decision, who spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of a formal announcement that is expected on Tuesday, the *AP* reported. Two people also anonymously confirmed the choice of Walensky; the post of CDC director does not require Senate confirmation, the *AP* said.

Becerra has led a coalition of Democratic states defending "Obamacare" from the Trump administration's latest effort to overturn it, a [legal case](#) the U.S. Supreme Court will consider next year, the *AP* said.

Becerra served for more than a decade in Congress, representing parts of Los Angeles County. As a senior House Democrat, Becerra was deeply involved in steering the Obama health law through Congress in 2009 and 2010, the *AP* said.

But overseeing the coronavirus response will be the most complicated task he has tackled: The United States will be in the middle of a mass vaccination campaign next year. So far, the vaccines have shown surprisingly strong efficacy, but it is impossible to tell how smoothly a national rollout of the vaccines will go.

Early in California's coronavirus response, Becerra defended broad shutdowns Gov. Gavin Newsom had put in place to curtail the pandemic, including limits on religious gatherings. Three churches in Southern California had sued Newsom, Becerra and other state officials because in-person church services had been halted.

As CDC director, Walensky would replace Dr. Robert Redfield. Walensky, who practices at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston, has spent most of her career combatting HIV/AIDS.

A global scourge

By Tuesday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 15 million while the death toll neared 284,000, according to a *Times* tally. According to the same tally, the top five states in coronavirus cases as of Tuesday were: Texas and California with over 1.3 million cases each; Florida with just over 1 million cases; Illinois with nearly 798,000; and New York with nearly 718,000.

Curbing the spread of the coronavirus in the rest of the world remains challenging.

Many European countries are tightening restrictions, the *Associated Press* reported. France has entered a nationwide lockdown, and Germany and Austria have started partial lockdowns as government officials across the continent scramble to slow a sharp rise in infections that threatens to overwhelm their health care systems.

England has followed suit, while Italy, Greece and Kosovo also announced new measures, the *AP* reported.

Things are no better in India, where the coronavirus case count passed 9.7 million on Tuesday, a Johns Hopkins University tally showed. Nearly 141,000 coronavirus patients have died in India, according to the Hopkins tally, but when measured as a proportion of the population, the country has had far fewer deaths than many others. Doctors say this reflects India's younger and leaner population. Still, the country's public health system is severely strained, and some sick patients cannot find hospital beds, the *Times* said. Only the United States has more [coronavirus](#) cases.

Meanwhile, Brazil had over 6.6 million cases and over 177,000 deaths as of Tuesday, the Hopkins tally showed.

Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 67.7 million on Tuesday, over 1.5 million deaths recorded, according to the Hopkins tally.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the new [coronavirus](#).

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