

In israel, widespread vaccination slashes severe COVID cases in older patients

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Israel is among the first nations in the world to have a majority of its

citizens vaccinated against the new coronavirus. That effort may be already paying off, with rates of severe COVID-19 cases declining by two-thirds among Israelis over the age of 69, a new report finds.

"These findings provide preliminary evidence of the effectiveness of vaccines in preventing severe cases of COVID-19," say public health researchers led by Yair Lewis, of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beer-Sheva, Israel.

They report their findings Feb. 26 in *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, a journal of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

With its 9 million people and highly organized, well-supplied COVID-19 vaccine rollout program, many see Israel as a harbinger of what's to come for other, larger countries once vaccines have been delivered into the arms of most citizens.

Like other nations, Israel has been hit hard by SARS-CoV-2: More than 700,000 cases and 5,200 deaths had been reported as of Feb. 9, Lewis' team said.

But beginning Dec. 20, Israel began a massive vaccination campaign, prioritizing older Israelis.

By early February, two doses of the highly effective Pfizer vaccine had been delivered to 84% of all Israelis age 70 and older, the research team said.

How is that success impacting the health of older Israelis?

To find out, Lewis' group compared rates of severe, life-threatening

COVID-19 (requiring use of a ventilator) in people over the age of 69 with that of patients aged at or under 50 years. By Feb. 9, only about 10% of these younger Israelis had gotten both doses of the Pfizer vaccine.

They report that in the fall—prior to the vaccine rollout—for every one COVID-19 patient under 50 with severe COVID-19, there were about six more aged 70 or older who were hooked up to the lifesaving machines.

But by Feb. 9, that ratio had dropped dramatically, so that for every 1 young patient with severe COVID-19, there were about 2 aged 70 or over. That's a 67% drop overall.

And the hope is that as vaccines reach the bulk of younger Israelis, numbers of severe COVID-19 cases will continue to fall among all age groups.

Lewis' group stressed that it took more than just vaccines to keep SARS-CoV-2 transmission down.

"Non-pharmaceutical interventions have included three national stay-at-home orders, multiple rounds of school closures, restrictions on [commercial activity](#) and travel, and a mask mandate, among others," Lewis' group noted.

But the Pfizer vaccine's high effectiveness has also been key. Indeed, on Feb. 19, Pfizer said its latest data—from 9,000 employees at Israel's largest hospital—suggests that just one dose of its [vaccine](#) may provide 85% protection against SARS-CoV-2.

More information: There's more on COVID-19 vaccination at the [CDC](#).

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