

Pfizer/BioNTech say vaccine effective against S.Africa variant

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Pfizer and BioNTech said Thursday their COVID-19 vaccine was highly effective against the South African variant in the latest phase of ongoing clinical trials.

No cases of the [disease](#) were observed in South Africa during the phase-three trial study among participants who had received their second dose, the companies said in a statement.

Several [coronavirus](#) variants with the potential to be more transmissible have caused global concern over whether existing vaccines will still protect the world from a virus that is constantly mutating.

"In South Africa, where the B.1.351 lineage is prevalent and 800 participants were enrolled, nine cases of COVID-19 were observed, all in the [placebo group](#)," the companies said.

The nine strains were sequenced and six of them were confirmed to be of B.1.351 lineage, they said.

"The high [vaccine](#) efficacy observed through up to six months following a second dose and against the variant prevalent in South Africa provides further confidence in our vaccine's overall effectiveness," said Albert Bourla, chief executive of Pfizer.

Overall, the vaccine was 91.3 percent effective against COVID-19 in the analysis of 46,307 trial participants across several countries.

From the 927 confirmed symptomatic cases of COVID-19 in the trial, 850 cases were in the placebo group and 77 cases were in the vaccinated group.

The vaccine was 100 percent effective in preventing severe disease as defined by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and 95.3 percent effective in preventing severe disease as defined by the US Food and Drug Administration.

Pfizer and BioNTech had said in January that "small differences"

detected in tests comparing the original virus and the recent versions "are unlikely to lead to a significant reduction in the effectiveness of the vaccine".

The companies said Thursday the new data "support previous results from immunogenicity studies demonstrating that (the vaccine) induced a robust neutralising antibody response to the B.1.351 (South African) variant, and although lower than to the wild-type strain, it does not appear to affect the high observed efficacy against this variant".

Global deaths from COVID-19 have topped 2.8 million since the pandemic began a year ago, with vaccines seen as the only real chance of returning to some form of normality.

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