

-Vaccination

Astra, Pfizer OK vs Delta—study

Europe agency warns new, more transmissible variant will cause 90% of cases in August

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COVID-19 vaccines made by AstraZeneca and the Pfizer-BioNTech alliance remain broadly effective against Delta and Kappa variants of the COVID-19 causing virus, which were first identified in India, according to a scientific study, underpinning a continued push to deliver the shots.

The study by Oxford University researchers, published in the journal *Cell*, investigated the ability of antibodies in the blood from people, who were vaccinated with the two-shot regimens, to neutralize the highly contagious Delta and Kappa variants, a statement said. Last week, an analysis by the Public Health England (PHE) showed that vaccines made by Pfizer Inc. and AstraZeneca offer high protection of more than 90 percent against hospitalization from the Delta variant.

The Delta variant is becoming the globally dominant version of the disease, the World Health Organization (WHO) said on Friday.

Accelerate vaccination

Echoing the WHO's warning, the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) said on Wednesday the Delta variant of COVID-19, first identified in India, will represent 90 percent of all SARS-CoV-2 viruses circulating in the European Union by the end of August.

Because of its increased transmissibility, the Delta variant is a matter of concern for many governments across Europe as most countries are easing restrictions in the wake of an overall fall in new COVID-19 cases.

In response to the surge in cases of Delta in Britain however, authorities are aiming to accelerate vaccination plans to give every adult a first COVID-19 vaccine by July 19, the new date at which COVID restrictions are to be lifted in England.

“It is very likely that the Delta variant will circulate extensively during the summer, particularly among younger individuals that are not targeted for vaccination,” the ECDC said. “This could cause a risk for the more vulnerable individuals to be infected and experience severe illness and death if they are not fully vaccinated.”

2 jabs for protection

But the ECDC said two doses of an approved COVID-19 vaccine offered “high protection” against the variant and its consequences.

Meanwhile, the US Food and Drug Administration said on Wednesday it plans to move quickly to add a warning about rare cases of heart inflammation in adolescents and young adults to fact sheets for the Pfizer and Moderna COVID-19 vaccines.

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) advisory groups, meeting to discuss reported cases of the heart condition after vaccination, found the inflammation in adolescents and young adults is likely linked to the vaccines, but that the benefits of the shots appeared to clearly outweigh the risk.

Moderna shares closed down 4.2 percent, while Pfizer fell 1.4 percent.

The Oxford researchers also analyzed the likelihood of reinfection in people who had previously had COVID-19.

Looking at the ability of antibodies in their blood samples to neutralize the variants, the risk of reinfection with the Delta variant appeared particularly high in individuals previously infected by the Beta and Gamma lineages that emerged in South Africa and Brazil, respectively.

By contrast, previous infection with the Alpha, or B117, variant first detected in Britain, conferred “reasonable” cross-protection against all variants of concern, lending itself as a template that next-generation vaccines could be molded on.

“B117 might be a candidate for new variant vaccines to provide the broadest protection,” the researchers said.