

HEALTH AND SCIENCE

Israel says Pfizer Covid vaccine is just 39% effective as delta spreads, but still prevents severe illness

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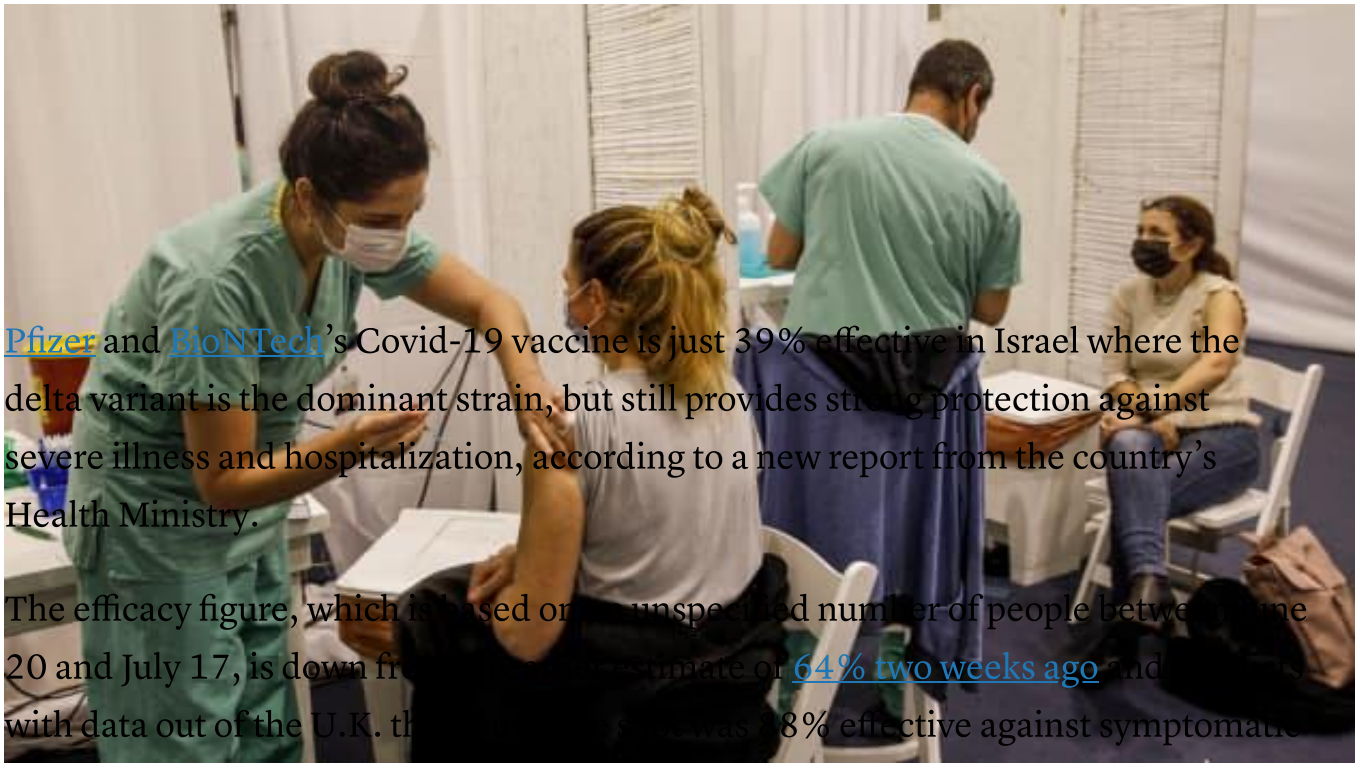
Pfizer and BioNTech's Covid-19 vaccine is just 39% effective in Israel where the delta variant is the dominant strain, according to a new report from the country's Health Ministry.

The two-dose vaccine still works very well in preventing people from getting seriously sick, demonstrating 88% effectiveness against hospitalization and 91% effectiveness against severe illness, according to the Israeli data.

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[Pfizer](#) and [BioNTech](#)'s Covid-19 vaccine is just 39% effective in Israel where the delta variant is the dominant strain, but still provides strong protection against severe illness and hospitalization, according to a new report from the country's Health Ministry.

The efficacy figure, which is based on an unspecified number of people between June 20 and July 17, is down from an earlier estimate of [64% two weeks ago](#) and is in line with data out of the U.K. that the vaccine was 38% effective against symptomatic disease caused by the variant.

However, the two-dose vaccine still works very well in preventing people from getting seriously sick, demonstrating 88% effectiveness against hospitalization and 91% effectiveness against severe illness, according to the Israeli data published Thursday.

"We have to be mindful that, with time, the effectiveness of these vaccines may wane," said Dr. Isaac Bogoch, an infectious disease professor at the University of Toronto.



He stressed that the shots are still highly effective in preventing severe infection, helping hospital systems not get too overwhelmed heading into the colder months. That being said, “we’re still in the Covid era and anything can happen,” he said.

“We have to be prepared and we have to be nimble that people may need a booster at some point,” he added. “This close surveillance that’s happening in countries like Israel, the U.K. and other parts of the world is going to be very helpful in driving policy if and when we do need boosters.”

The delta variant, already in more than 104 countries, is concerning health officials in the U.S. as they see more breakthrough infections, which occur in fully vaccinated people, even though they are more mild.

CNBC Health & Science

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White House chief medical officer Dr. Anthony Fauci said fully vaccinated people might want to consider wearing masks indoors as a precaution against the rapidly spreading variant in the U.S.

Health experts are [concerned about the fall season](#), when delta is expected to hit states with the lowest vaccination rates the hardest — unless those states and businesses reintroduce mask rules, capacity limits and other public health measures



“That’s something we obviously don’t want to see,” Fauci [said Wednesday](#), noting the so-called breakthrough infections. “This virus is clearly different than the viruses and the variants that we’ve had experience with before. It has an extraordinary capability of transmitting from person to person.”

Dr. Paul Offit, who advises the FDA on Covid vaccines, said while the vaccines still provide excellent protection against severe disease and death, they may not work as well against mild cases or spreading the disease to others.

He urged more Americans to get vaccinated, saying delta is a highly contagious virus and the shots will help people from getting seriously sick. Currently, less than half of the U.S. population is fully vaccinated, according to data compiled by the CDC.

“That is a rich and fertile ground for the virus to continue to reproduce itself and continue to create variants that possibly become more and more resistant to vaccines or natural infection,” he said.

WHO officials said Monday that the longer that people around the world remain unvaccinated and social mixing continues, the higher the risk of a more dangerous variant to emerge.

The report out of Israel, which began vaccinating its population ahead of many other countries, is likely to bolster arguments from drugmakers that people will eventually need to get booster shots to protect against emerging variants.

Pfizer [said](#) earlier this month it is starting to see waning immunity from its two-dose vaccine, and now plans to seek authorization from the Food and Drug Administration for a booster dose. However, federal officials say fully vaccinated Americans do not need additional shots at this time.

In a statement to CNBC, Pfizer said it remains confident its two-dose regimen is protective against the coronavirus and its variants.

Still, it said a third dose may be helpful after analysis from its phase three study showed a decline in efficacy against symptomatic infection after four to six months.

“Initial data of a third dose of the current vaccine demonstrates that a booster dose given at least 6 months after the second dose elicits high neutralization titers against



the wild type and the Beta, which are 5 to 10 times higher than after two primary doses,” the company said.

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