

Editorial

Booster Dose Benefits against Omicron

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Editor

There was still little evidence that additional doses were needed to protect against developing severe Covid disease, many vulnerable people and health workers in poorer nations have yet to receive a single dose and remain at great risk.

Global supply is again going to revert to high-income countries hoarding vaccine to protect their populations. WHO vaccines Chief Kate O'Brien pointed out that the world had only just begun addressing the dangerous inequity in vaccine access in the past two months, with more donated doses and large shipments going to underserved countries.

She said the WHO was examining the data, and that it may turn out that "additional doses have benefit to provide added protection against Omicron", but stressed it was still "very early days".

She said "where transmission continues ... is where the variants are going to come from," she warned, urging "a much more rational global perspective from countries about what's actually going to shut down this pandemic."

Meanwhile, two doses of the BioNTech and Pfizer coronavirus vaccine may not be enough to protect against the Omicron strain, said the experts, but they stressed it was "still effective" after a third jab.

The first independent data from labs around the world emerged, suggesting that the new variant is better at evading vaccine-trained immunity than those before it by the experts.

In preliminary results published by Pfizer and BioNTech said their vaccine "is still effective in preventing Covid-19, also against Omicron, if it has been administered three times". But they warned that "the Omicron variant is probably not sufficiently neutralised after two doses."

According to early laboratory research using blood serum from vaccinated people, a booster third dose generated around the same level of antibodies against Omicron as is seen after a second dose with the initial strain.

But they added that another part of the immune response -- from T cells -- were probably still effective against the variant, adding that "vaccinated individuals may still be protected against severe forms of the disease".

"Boosters will definitely be helpful in keeping the rate of Omicron breakthrough slower". WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus summarized what is so far known about Omicron -- it poses higher infection risks to people who have already had the virus or been vaccinated than previous variants, and there is a preliminary indication it could cause milder disease.

But even if confirmed to be less severe, the variant is likely even more transmissible than Delta, meaning it could reach and thus sicken more people.

The United Kingdom has begun giving booster shots to individuals at least three months after their second dose, while the delay to receive an additional shot is longer elsewhere.

The UN health agency's experts also said over-60s fully immunised with China's Sinovac and Sinopharm vaccines should be offered an additional third Covid-19 vaccine dose. The Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation (SAGE) stressed it was not recommending an additional booster dose for the population at large, which is already being rolled out in some countries.

Researchers compared 11.3 million vaccinated over-50s with the same number of unvaccinated from the same age group between 27 December 2020, when vaccinations began in France, and 20 July this year.

They found "a reduction in the risk of hospitalisation superior to 90%" from the 14th day after the second dose and a similar reduction in the number of deaths from Covid-19.

No doubt omicron variant is spreading rapidly but not fatal. Booster dose also started at mass level in the whole Pakistan from the protection of new variant omicron.