CORONAVIRUS NEWS BRIEF

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In a potential leap forward in the global fight against the pandemic, drug maker Merck said that its experimental pill for people sick with COVID-19 reduced hospitalizations and deaths by half.

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Merck says
COVID-19 pill cuts risk of death, hospitalization.

By MATTHEW PERRONE, AP Health Writer

In a potential leap forward in the global fight against the pandemic, drug maker Merck said Friday that its experimental pill for people sick with COVID-19 reduced hospitalizations and deaths by half.

This Dec.18, 2014, file photo, shows the Merck logo on a stained glass panel at a Merck company building in Kenilworth, N.J. Merck & Co. announced Friday, Oct. 1, 2021, that its experimental COVID-19 pill reduced hospitalizations and deaths by half in people recently infected with the coronavirus and that it would soon ask health officials in the U.S. and around the world to authorize its use.

If cleared by regulators, it would be the first pill shown to treat COVID-19, adding a whole new, easy-to-use weapon to an arsenal that already includes the vaccine.

The company said it will soon ask health officials in the U.S. and around the world to authorize the pill's use. A decision from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration could come within weeks after that, and the drug, if it gets the OK, could be distributed quickly soon afterward.

All other COVID-19 treatments now authorized in the U.S. require an IV or injection. A pill taken at home, by contrast, would ease pressure on hospitals and could also help curb outbreaks in poorer and more remote corners of the world that don't have access to the more expensive infusion therapies.

"This would allow us to treat many more people much more quickly and, we trust, much less expensively," said Dr. William Schaffner, an infectious disease expert at Vanderbilt University who was not involved in the research.

Merck and its partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutics said early results showed patients who received the drug, molnupiravir, within five days of COVID-19 symptoms had about half the rate of hospitalization and death as those who received a dummy pill.

The study tracked 775 adults with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 who were considered high risk for severe disease because of health problems such as obesity, diabetes or heart disease. The results have not been reviewed by outside experts, the usual procedure for vetting new medical research.

Among patients taking molnupiravir, 7.3% were either hospitalized or died at the end of 30 days, compared with 14.1% of those getting the dummy pill. After that time period, there were no deaths among those who received the drug, compared with eight in the placebo group, according to Merck.

The results were so strong that an independent group of medical experts monitoring the trial recommended stopping it early.

Company executives said they plan to submit the data to the FDA in the coming days.

Even with the news of a potentially effective new treatment, experts stressed the importance of vaccines

for controlling the pandemic, given that they help prevent transmission and also reduce the severity of illness in those who do get infected.

White House coronavirus coordinator Jeff Zients said that vaccination will remain the government's main strategy for controlling the pandemic. "We want to prevent infections, not just wait to treat them when they happen," he said.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the government's foremost authority on infectious diseases, called the results from Merck "very good news."

Merck only studied its drug in people who were not vaccinated. But FDA regulators may consider authorizing it for broader use in vaccinated patients who get breakthrough COVID-19 symptoms.

Andrew Pekosz of Johns Hopkins University predicted vaccines and antiviral drugs would ultimately be used together to protect against the worst effects of COVID-19.

This undated image provided by Merck & Co. shows their new antiviral medication. Pharmaceutical company Merck & Co. said Friday, Oct. 1, 2021, that its experimental COVID-19 pill reduced hospitalizations and deaths by half in people recently infected with the coronavirus and that it would soon ask health officials in the U.S. and around the world to authorize its use. (Merck & Co. via AP).

"These shouldn't be seen as replacements for vaccination — the two should be seen as two strategies that can be used together to significantly reduce severe disease," said Pekosz, a virology specialist.

Patients take four pills of molnupiravir twice a day for five days. Side effects were reported by both groups in the Merck trial, but they were slightly more common among those who received a dummy pill. The company did not specify the problems.

Earlier study results showed the drug did not benefit patients who were already hospitalized with severe disease. That's not surprising, given that antiviral drugs are most effective when used before the virus ramps up in the body.

The U.S. has approved one antiviral drug, remdesivir, for COVID-19, and allowed emergency use of three antibody therapies that help the immune system fight the virus. But all the drugs are expensive and have to given by IV or injection at hospitals or clinics, and supplies have been stretched by the latest surge of the delta variant.

The antibody drugs have been shown to reduce hospitalization and death by roughly 70% when given to high-risk patients, roughly 20 percentage points more than Merck's pill. But experts cautioned against comparing results from the two, given the preliminary nature of Merck's data.

Health experts, including Fauci, have long called for a convenient pill that patients could take when COVID-19 symptoms first appear, much the way Tamiflu is given to help speed recovery from the flu.

Like other antivirals, Merck's pill works by interfering with the virus's ability to copy its genetic code and reproduce itself.

The U.S. government has committed to purchasing enough pills to treat 1.7 million people, assuming the FDA authorizes the drug. Merck said it can produce pills for 10 million patients by the end of the year and has contracts with governments worldwide. The company has not announced prices.

Several other companies, including Pfizer and Roche, are studying similar drugs and could report results in the coming weeks and months.

Merck had planned to enroll more than 1,500 patients in its late-stage trial before the independent board stopped it early. The results reported Friday included patients across Latin America, Europe and Africa. Executives estimated 10% of patients studied were from the U.S.

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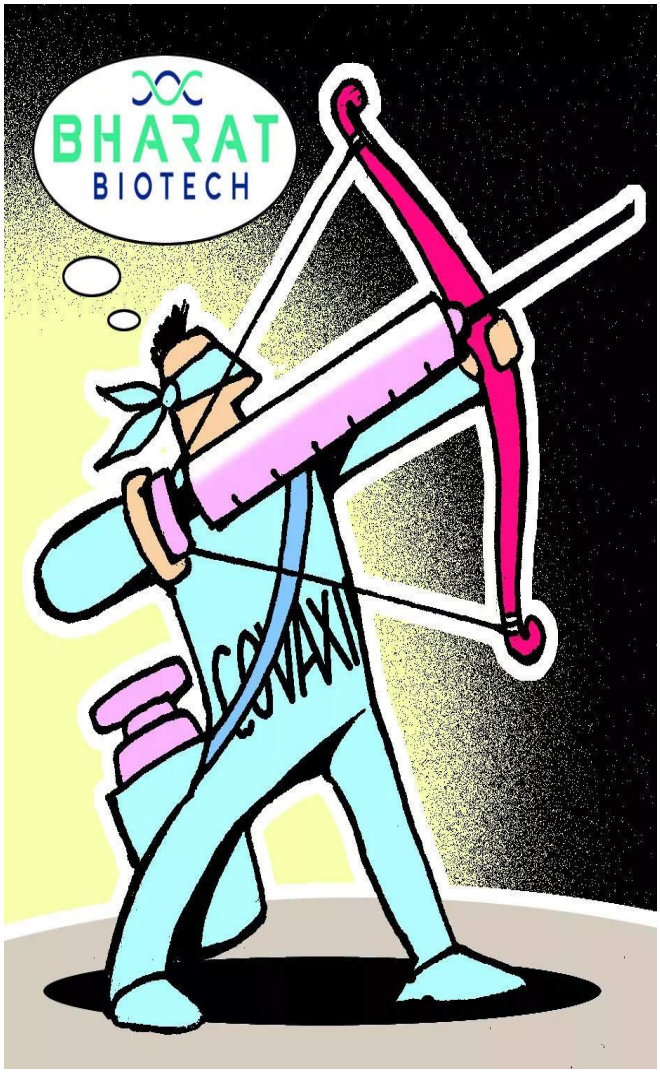
Why is it taking so long for Covaxin's WHO approval?



The World Health Organisation's (WHO) Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) on Immunisation will meet on Tuesday to determine if Bharat Biotech International's (BBIL) Covid-19 vaccine, Covaxin, can be granted emergency use listing (EUL).

What's the hold-up

The world health body says that "EUL process can be carried out quickly when vaccine developers submit the full data required by WHO in a timely manner" only after which can it "rapidly assemble its evaluation team and regulators from around the world to assess the information and, when necessary, carry out inspections of manufacturing sites."

BBIL had applied for the EUL on April 19 earlier this year but the WHO had in May said that "more information" was "required" in order to consider the company's expression of interest (EoI) for EUL. At that time the company claimed it had submitted 90% of the documents needed for WHO's approval for EUL, while later in July, its chairman and managing director Krishna Ella claimed that "all documents required for emergency use listing (EUL) of Covaxin have been submitted to WHO as of 9th July."

However, last month, WHO further delayed the approval to grant EUL to Covaxin due to certain technical queries, according to several media reports — which makes the October 5 SAGE meeting crucial for the vaccine's approval.

A vaccine full of controversies

In June, the USFDA rejected BBIL's application seeking emergency use authorisation (EUA) for Covaxin, reportedly because of not submitting data from its Phase-3 clinical trials — which, incidentally, were not released even in India by that time. BBIL had then said it will not seek EUL from USFDA but instead seek "full approval."The vaccine's approval in January also generated a furore as it came to light that it had been granted EUL in India without completion of the final phase of human clinical trials — with the drug regulator expressing misgivings and giving it approval for only "clinical trial mode" rather than being administered to the population en masse.The All India Peoples Science Network (AIPSN), which had earlier called out BBIL for full disclosure of Covaxin's trial data, last week said that the company "applied to DCGI for EUA with grossly inadequate data from clinical trials inviting rejection, followed by behind-the-scenes arm twisting by government which resulted in the grant of EUA."

It added that the flawed application to WHO by BBIL had "besmirched the standing of Indian science and regulatory systems, which will now come under heightened international scrutiny and suspicion."

Inadequate numbers

Moreover, BBIL's has also failed to ramp up its production capacity as promised, with just one in 11 people in India being inoculated with Covaxin. While in May, the Centre had in an affidavit submitted to the Supreme Court said that BBIL will be supplying about 10 crore doses a month from August, the company in September managed to supply just 3.5 crore doses while in October,

Ella said it will be able to supply only 5.5 crore doses. It usually tales 120 days from start to finish for a batch of vaccines to be shipped to market.

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Dr. Fauci Issued These 3 New Warnings

The US has passed a grim milestone: 700,000 dead from COVID. The deaths continue, as the "more transmissible" Delta variant spreads, mainly hurting those among the 70mn who are unvaccinated. Concerned that more "avoidable" deaths are sure to come, Dr. Fauci, the chief medical advisor to the President and the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, appeared with a warning.

Warning #1: Dr. Fauci Warned Delta is "the Most Formidable Virus"

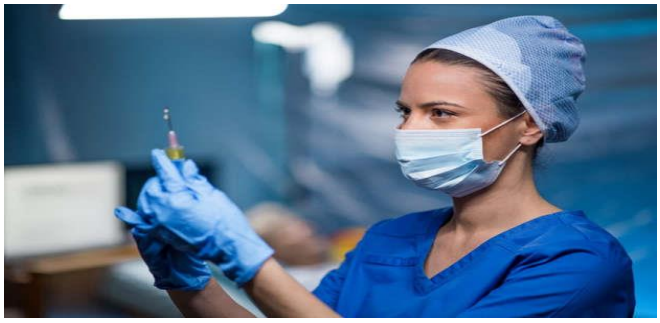
"This is the most formidable virus," said Dr. Fauci. "It is really. From the very beginning. It has evolved to the point where we're now dealing with this Delta variant, which is an extraordinary virus in the sense—the same virus is still SARS-CoV-2, except that it has the capability of transmitting extraordinarily efficiently. There are certain elements about this that would just unavoidable in the sense that there are going to be deaths. They're going to be a lot of infections globally, no matter what anyone did, but there were situations where we could have done better and we can do better. And I think we're living through that right now, because we now have within our capability, highly effective and safe vaccines. And although we've done well in the sense that we now have 55% of the population fully vaccinated, 64% having received at least one dose, but there are 70 million people who are eligible to be vaccinated who have not gotten vaccinated." He said some of those deaths, therefore were "avoidable, they certainly are. In fact, looking forward now, most of the deaths could be avoidable if we get people vaccinated. Because if you look at the people who get hospitalized and the people who die, it is overwhelmingly weighted towards the people who are unvaccinated. So where we are right now, many of these could be avoidable.

Warning #2: Dr. Fauci Said New COVID Pill is a "Big Deal" But You Still Should Get Vaccinated.

Regarding the new COVID pill, Dr. Fauci says, "it's a big deal. You have now a small molecule, a drug that can be given orally and the results of the trial that were just announced yesterday and the day before are really quite impressive. I mean, if you do a statistical significant analysis on it, it's very, very significant cutting the deaths and hospitalization by 50%. Importantly, in the placebo versus the drug group in the drug group, there were zero deaths in the placebo group, there were eight deaths. So that is, you know, no matter how you slice that, that's impressive. So we're really looking forward to the implementation of this." However, that does not mean the vaccine is unnecessary. "Absolutely not," said Fauci. "That's such a false—that someone says, well, now you have a drug. Remember the easiest way to stay out

of the hospital and not die is don't get infected."

Warning #3: Are We Turning the Corner?..



"We certainly are turning the corner on this particular surge," said Dr. Fauci, "but we have experience over now close to 20 months of surges that go up and then come down and then go back up again. The way to keep it down to make that turn around, continue to go down is to do what we mentioned: Get people vaccinated. When you have 70 million people in the country who are eligible to be vaccinated, who are not yet vaccinated, that's the danger zone right there. So it's within our capability to make sure that that turnaround that was seeing that very favorable and optimistic turnaround continues to go down and doesn't do what we've seen multiple times before, where it goes down and then it comes back up. We can do that merely by getting vaccinated." Keep reading for two more essential pieces of advice.

Dr. Fauci Said Mandating Vaccines for Kids is Nothing New.

California will mandate vaccines for all students, once the vaccine is available for all age ranges. "I have been in and I still am in favor of these kinds of mandates," said Dr. Fauci. "You can make some exceptions to them, but in general, people look at this, like this is something novel and new. When in fact, throughout, years and years, decades, we have made it a requirement for children to get into schools, to get different types of vaccines, measles, mumps, rubella, and others. So when people treat this as something novel and terrible, it isn't a requirement for children to come to school, to be vaccinated with certain vaccines. It's not something new it's been around for a very long time." He says the COVID vaccine has "proved to be safe and effective."

How to Stay Safe Out There.

Follow the public health fundamentals and help end this pandemic, no matter where you live—get vaccinated ASAP; if you live in an area with low vaccination rates, wear an N95 face mask, don't travel, social distance, avoid large crowds, don't go indoors with people you're not sheltering with (especially in bars), practice good hand hygiene, and to protect your life and the lives of others.

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FDA May Authorize Half-Dose Moderna Booster

The FDA is leaning toward authorizing half-dose booster shots of Moderna's COVID-19 vaccine.

Federal regulators believe the half-dose shot could provide enough protection. The move could broaden the U.S. booster campaign, Bloomberg News reported, though it's unclear when an official announcement about the Moderna vaccine will come.

Moderna's initial shots contained 100-microgram doses, and the company's submission for extra shots has pushed for 50-microgram boosters. In comparison, Pfizer's initial shots and boosters contain 30-microgram doses.

A half-dose shot could make side effects from a booster less likely, Bloomberg News reported. If the FDA approves it, Moderna could produce more doses to distribute globally, which could ease supply concerns and send more shots to countries that haven't given many first shots.

As of Tuesday evening, Moderna, the FDA, and the White House declined to comment on the half-dose plan, Bloomberg News reported.

For now, booster shots are available to recipients of the Pfizer vaccine who are ages 65 and older, adults living in long-term care facilities, adults with certain health conditions, and workers who face high risks of contracting COVID-19. Those who are eligible for a third shot can receive one 6 months after their second dose.

So far, the side effects reported after a third dose appear to be similar to side effects seen after a second dose, according to new CDC data published this week.

More than 12,500 vaccine recipients completed the CDC's "V-safe" survey after receiving a booster shot. Most said side effects were "mild or moderate," including fever, headache, and reactions around the injection site such as itching, pain, redness, and swelling.

"This report includes some of the data of our early experience with third doses that FDA and CDC reviewed when they made their recommendations about boosters," Rochelle Walensky, MD, the CDC director, said during a news briefing on Tuesday.

"We will continue to evaluate data as it becomes available, in real time and with urgency, and update our recommendations to make sure that all of those at risk have the protection they need," she said. "This includes those who received the Moderna and J&J vaccines as their primary vaccine and also those younger Americans who are not currently eligible for a booster dose."

California to require students get vaccinated against COVID-19 after full FDA approval.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) has announced plans to require eligible students get vaccinated against COVID-19, making his state the first in the U.S. to unveil such a mandate.

Newsom said Friday that eligible students who are participating in in-person instruction will be required to get vaccinated against COVID-19 after the Food and Drug Administration gives full approval to the vaccine for their age group, the Los Angeles Times reports. COVID-19 vaccines are currently available for children 12 and older under an emergency authorization, but they have only been fully approved for those 16 and over.

The mandate will go into effect for eligible students during the term following full FDA approval of the vaccine, and there will be exemptions for medical reasons and for personal and religious beliefs. "State officials expect the mandate to begin taking effect next fall," the Los Angeles Times writes.

During a news conference, Newsom said the COVID-19 vaccine would be added to the state's "well-established list" of 10 vaccines mandated for students. He similarly wrote on Twitter, "Our schools already require vaccines for measles, mumps and more. Why? Because vaccines work." The governor said waiting to implement the mandate until after full FDA approval will give California "time to work with" districts, parents, and educators on the plan.

"I believe we will be the first state in America to move forward with this mandate and requirement, but I do not believe, by any stretch of the imagination, we will be the last state," Newsom said. "In fact, I anticipate other states to follow suit."

DVT & COVID19: What Are the Links?

By Alexandra Benisek

During the COVID-19 pandemic, doctors have seen more cases of blood clot-related conditions like deep vein thrombosis (DVT). It's concerning because studies show that having a blood clot while you have the virus raises your chance of death by 74%.

Elliott Richard Haut, MD, an associate professor of emergency medicine at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, is one of a group of doctors and researchers around the world who are trying to figure out the connection between DVT, pulmonary embolism (PE), and COVID-19. "There's lots of different potential reasons," he says. "Trying to come up with every single pathway is really hard."

It's Probably Not What You Think

Many people believe that moving around can help avoid clotting issues like DVT.

But a recent study found no major link suggesting that movement alone helped lower the risk of blood clots in hospitalized people.

So while most of us are less active during the pandemic, that fact alone probably won't trigger a blood clot.

"The reality is, a lot of illnesses may cause sedentary states, and we are seeing higher rates of COVID-19-related thrombosis than other [illnesses]," says Lucy Kornblith, MD, a surgeon at the University of California San Francisco. She believes it's much more likely that other issues related to the virus itself cause the rise in blood clot cases.

Blood Thinners and COVID-19

From the start of the pandemic, experts knew there was a tie between a higher chance of blood clots and the COVID-19 virus. To combat this, doctors looked at how they gave blood thinners to people hospitalized with the virus. They'd either get a high dose or, instead of just one dose, they'd get a continuous infusion.

But there wasn't data to show that this plan would help. Doctors were simply doing all they could to stop blood clots amid the surge in COVID-19 cases. Soon after the virus took hold, many researchers began to study the reason for this wave of blood clot cases and the best way to lower the odds of clotting during the pandemic.

The idea was that people were either refusing their doses or, according to Haut, "the doctors were focused on other treatments [for COVID-19] and were not writing prescriptions for blood clot prevention."

But they discovered that people with COVID-19 were more likely to get all the medication they needed -- including blood clot prevention drugs -- than first thought.

"It made us actually feel pretty good … we were doing the best we could as far as best practice," Haut says. "But in some ways, it's too bad, because that's a relatively easy fix."

Since missing doses wasn't a culprit, some researchers thought it was the amount of blood thinning drugs given to those with COVID-19. In one study, doctors gave some people a regular preventive dose of blood thinners while others got a high-dose, continuous infusion.

They did this with people who were mildly sick with COVID-19 and those who were severely ill with it.

People hospitalized with COVID-19 without DVTs had better outcomes when they got the high-dose, continuous infusion, compared to those who got the preventive dose. But people who were critically ill with COVID-19 didn't have the same results.

"If there's no evidence of a DVT, and you give a critically ill patient in an intensive care unit (ICU) a constant infusion of a high-dose blood thinner, not only does it not benefit them, but there's an increased risk of harm and bleeding," says Scott Cameron, MD, section head of vascular medicine at the Cleveland Clinic.

"What that tells us is that even a little bit of data is simply not enough to make the decision of the clinician to treat a patient differently during the COVID era," he says.

Surveillance Bias

Another possible factor in the surge of DVT cases could be from a simple concept: The more you look, the more you find.

While this probably doesn't explain the entire link between the two conditions, it could partly explain why so many more blood clots show up in those with COVID-19.

"We've found that doing lots of ultrasound testing finds a lot more DVT," Haut says. "It might find DVTs that are asymptomatic and not causing issues." Similarly, people may come into the hospital with DVTs that are unrelated to COVID-19. And doctors may find these blood clots and wonder if the virus plays a part.

Some doctors suggest that screening for DVT should happen only if someone shows symptoms of a blood clot. This will not only help researchers understand the tie between COVID-19 and clotting, but it will also lessen possible spread of the virus.

"One of the issues that's created across the world is that we're potentially subjecting health care workers to unnecessary risks [of COVID-19] when the patient doesn't have any [DVT] symptoms," Cameron says.

The Lasting Effects

Whatever the reason for these blood clots, experts have taken a look at the emotional effects of a life-threatening blood clot, as well as when it's paired with COVID-19.

"We're really interested in this post-thrombotic stress disorder because there's no research on it," says Rachel Rosovsky, MD, a hematology specialist at Massachusetts General Hospital.

For people with blood clots, the goal is to prevent further clots, lessen bleeding, and avoid death. While those areas are extremely important, "they don't capture any patient-relevant outcomes: quality of life, functional ability, depression, anxiety, social isolation, unemployment, or excess health costs."

Leslie Lake, board president of the National Blood Clot Alliance, who herself has had a life-threatening blood clot in her lungs, says she felt "terrified" after she returned from the hospital after a pulmonary embolism.

"The mental side of the equation is something that I still grapple with. It was harder for me to deal with than the actual physical event of me getting a blood clot," she says.

"I had never gone to a therapist in my life, and I went to [one] because I was so terrified that I was going to die."

Lake belongs to many blood clot social media groups and says that people post daily about their posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from the condition.

During the pandemic, the anxiety linked to life-threatening conditions, like certain blood clots, has only gone up. People are now in the ICU for days by themselves. If someone has COVID-19, they aren't able to see loved ones or have in-person support.

They may also have a blood clot, which adds another layer of fear and furthers their chances of long-term mental side effects.

It's become so prevalent that clinics now exist for people with PTSD and anxiety after a life-threatening blood clot. These are especially important during the pandemic so that we can understand not only the physical long-term effects, but the mental impacts of the virus and DVT.

"We are just starting to skim the surface of understanding the long-term effects of COVID on patients both medically as well as emotionally," Kornblith says.

"The focus has really been on that initial treatment phase, and now we have this whole population of patients who have had COVID. That really needs to be a focus going forward."

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(Editor's note:

Please use your common sense to donate to the right organization. If possible, give priority to your own family, neighbors and your village/Town or area healthcare systems directly. There are fraudulent organizations be aware of them. Look into the need and response to those priorities. Get some advice from your Doctors or helping organizations. Many time Cash Donations are more effective than kind. I would recommend donating to Red Cross of India, UNICEF, Oxfam India, and Care India. In my personal opinion, do not send any contributions to India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's PM Care Fund as its not transparent and has no accountability. -Kaushik Amin.)

CORONAVIRUS: NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD:

US surpasses 700,000 Covid deaths.

White flags marking US Covid-19 deaths -- a toll which has surpassed 700,000 -- are seen on the National Mall near the White House as part of a September 2021 project.

US fatalities from Covid-19 surpassed 700,000 on Friday, according to figures from Johns Hopkins University, a toll roughly equivalent to the population of the nation's capital Washington.

The grim threshold comes with an average of well over 1,000 dying each day, in a country where 55.7 percent of the population is now fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

After a heavily criticized early response to the pandemic, the United States organized an effective vaccine roll-out -- only to see a significant portion of Americans still refusing to get the shots.

The United States finds itself having notched the most fatalities in the world, far exceeding other frontrunners such as Brazil and India, and facing a resurgence in cases due to the prominence of the highly contagious Delta variant.

While the latest global coronavirus wave peaked in late August, the virus continues to spread rapidly, particularly in the United States.

The vaccination campaign launched by US authorities in December -- which had reached a peak in April, with sometimes more than four million injections per day -- has meanwhile slowed considerably.

Coronavirus misinformation has been rampant in the country, and masking remains a political issue, dividing many Americans.

Some Republican governors, such as those in Texas and Florida, have sought to ban mandatory masking in their states, citing individual freedoms.

The Democratic state of California on the other hand announced on Friday that Covid vaccinations will be compulsory for all students.

In Washington, hundreds of thousands of white flags fluttered on the grass on the National Mall, not far from the White House, as somber reminders of those who have died of Covid in the United States.

Nearly 4.8 million people worldwide have died since the outbreak began in China in December 2019, according to an AFP tally from official sources.

****Florida's current COVID-19 hospitalizations fall under 5,000, only 810 more vaccinated.***

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Sunday report showed 4,979 COVID-19 patients listed from 258 Florida hospitals, continuing a trend of decreasing hospitalizations.

That's 237 fewer patients than Saturday's report from 260 hospitals. In Sunday's report, COVID-19 patients occupied 8.7% of inpatient beds in those hospitals, compared with 8.96% in the previous day's reporting hospitals.

****For holiday parties, CDC says using a 'window fan' is advisable.***

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released recommendations Saturday for the upcoming holiday season, including the idea of using a window fan to keep air at an indoor party as fresh as possible.

"If celebrating indoors, bring in fresh air by opening windows and doors, if possible," its holiday celebrations guidance states:

"You can use a window fan in one of the open windows to blow air out of the window. This will pull fresh air in through the other open windows."

India's taking off!

Domestic air travel demand was on a steady rise globally until August when concerns over the Delta variant of the coronavirus reversed the trend in countries such as China, US, Japan, Australia and Brazil. However, in India, buoyed by vaccination drives and a drop in Covid cases, domestic traffic demand has continued its steady month-on-month climb since June, per recent data released by the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the global airlines' trade body.

In India, the climb recommenced in June after a huge drop in April-May during the second Covid wave, which made India's domestic air travel demand take the deepest plunge worldwide. Domestic air travel demand (measured in revenue passenger kilometres: number of kilometres flown by all passengers) was the lowest in May. It fell 71% as compared to the pre-Covid month of May 2019, showed IATA data. Only Japan with a 68.5% drop in demand as compared to May 2019 came close.But India caught up in August: its domestic travel demand rose to almost half of that in pre-Covid August 2019. It had been down 60% in July.

In August, domestic passenger traffic at Mumbai airport touched 1.4 million, which is what the airport had handled in March, the month air travel demand began its sharp drop due to the second wave, showed Airports Authority of India data.

In April, domestic passenger traffic at Mumbai was down to 0.9 million and in May, fell further to 0.4 million, before the trend reversed in June and domestic traffic increased to 0.6 million. Similarly, Delhi airport's domestic passenger traffic had peaked in March with 2.9 million passengers and the airport inched close to that number in August with 2.6 million.

What we know India's newest Covid vaccine about.

As the government prepares to roll-out the administration of the first Covid-19 vaccine for children between 12-17 years of age, ZyCoV-D, which is expected from tomorrow, here's what we know about it so far:

A first

It's the world's first DNA-based vaccine against the novel coronavirus. DNA vaccines depend on the in situ production of the target antigen when introduced into the tissues of a plasmid that contains the DNA sequence encoding the antigens.

This is the second indigenously developed Covid-19 vaccine to be granted emergency use authorisation, after Bharat Biotech's Covaxin.

How it works

Plasmids are circular strands of DNA encoding the spike protein of SARS-CoV-2. ZyCoV-D contains these plasmids, which, upon entering the nuclei of cells, are converted to mRNA, which travel to the cytoplasm or the cell's main body where they transform into the spike protein itself and in turn instigate an immune response from the body against it. While plasmids degrade within a matter of a few weeks or months, the immunity remains.

The delivery

Unlike other vaccines currently being administered via a needle and a syringe, the ZyCoV-D will be administered via a needle-free system, intradermally, using a PharmaJet, which is a needle-free applicator to ensure painless vaccination.

This will be a three-dose vaccine — most others are two dose vaccines — with the second dose administered 28 days after the first dose and the third dose given 56 days after the first one.

The efficacy

It has an efficacy of 66.6%, which is the lowest among all Covid-19 vaccines currently available in India — Covishied (91% after two doses 8-10 weeks apart), Covaxin (78%) and Sputnik (78.6% to 83.7%). WHO recommends a minimum efficacy of 50%.

The price

The Centre is yet to decide on its pricing but it's likely to be priced higher than Covishield, a single dose of which costs Rs 780 while Covaxin is priced at Rs 1,410 and Sputnik at Rs 1,145.

**** Covaxin may get final WHO approval by end of month.***

The World Health Organization (WHO) will be taking a decision on the Emergency Use Listing (EUL) of India's first indigenously developed Covid-19 vaccine Covaxin in October.

The global health body updated the decision date for Bharat Biotech's Covaxin to October 2021, per its latest EUL guidance document for Covid-19 vaccines, from the earlier "yet to be confirmed".

While the WHO website shows Covaxin's assessment status as "ongoing", WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunisation (SAGE) — the principal advisory group to WHO for vaccines and immunisation — will be meeting on Tuesday to discuss and consider for recommendation the EUL for Covaxin.

As per the draft agenda of the SAGE meeting uploaded on WHO's website, SAGE will discuss the Covaxin phase 1, 2, 3 clinical trials data and post-marketing studies on safety, immunogenicity, efficacy and effectiveness as well as the outline of ongoing and planned studies on its safety and effectiveness along with updates on global, regional and country level plans for vaccine safety monitoring.

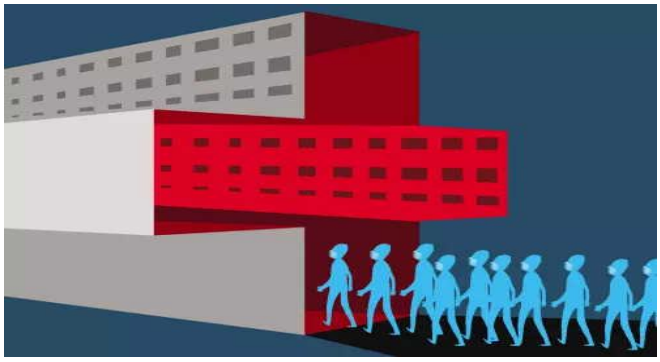
"Based on the presented evidences, the expert panel will present its draft recommendations on the use of Bharat Biotech's vaccine in priority populations," said the SAGE agenda.

Covaxin's EUL has been under WHO review since July 6 when the rolling data submission started. Many of those who have taken the two-dose inactivated virus vaccine have been awaiting a WHO approval as it would make international travel smoother.

**Overseas citizens can seek medical admission in general category.*

The Supreme Court Thursday allowed overseas citizens of India candidates to be considered for medical admission under the general category for the upcoming year, and not as a Non-resident Indian (NRI) as the union government had wanted. The order is applicable only to the 2021-22 academic year.

The court was hearing a bunch of petitions by OCI candidates and their parents residing in India for the past seven to 17 years challenging a union home ministry notification issued this March that said OCIs will be treated on par with NRIs for NEET and other college admissions. The petitioners argued the fees for seats allocated for NRIs are high and impossible for them to meet with such short notice.



The government had opposed their plea arguing treating OCI candidates on a par with regular citizens was not fair, arguing they had "voluntarily taken up the citizenship of another country".

The court permitted the OCI candidates to appear for NEET counselling in the general category for the academic year 2021-22 but acknowledged the government's concern that OCI candidates have not relinquished their foreign citizenship and therefore could "use the resources of India" and then go elsewhere to earn more. "You want to have the best of both countries, " the court said.

**Serum to enrol 7-11 year olds for vaccine trials.*

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) has greenlighted Serum Institute of India's (SII) plan to enroll children in the 7-11 year age group for clinical trials of the Covid-19 vaccine developed by US pharma major Novavax. The vaccine is being developed in India by SII as Covovax.

The decision was taken on Tuesday by the subject expert committee (SEC) of the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) "after detailed deliberation...for allowing enrolment of subjects of 7 to 11 years of age group as per the protocol." SII is already conducting trials for the same vaccine on the

12-17 year old age group and has submitted safety data for trials conducted on the first 100 participants.
SII CEO Adar Poonawalla had earlier this month said that he's expecting approval for the vaccine, to be administered to those under the age of 18, by January or February next year. Only Zydus Cadila's ZyCoV-D has so far been granted emergency use authorisation for administering to children in the age group of 12-17 years — which however, is yet to be rolled out.

YouTube cracks down on content spreading misleading vaccine information.

YouTube is banning content that spreads misleading or false information about coronavirus vaccines, the streaming video service announced in a blog post Wednesday. Under the crackdown, YouTube is taking down video channels associated with high-profile anti-vaccine activists, including Joseph Mercola and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. Experts say misinformation from these channels is partly to blame for weak vaccination rates. "This is not one that should have been complicated," said Hany Farid, a computer science professor and misinformation researcher at the University of California at Berkeley.

"We had 18 months to think about these issues, we knew the vaccine was coming, why was this not the policy from the very beginning?"

Coronavirus

The CDC is seriously urging pregnant Americans and those who have recently given birth to get vaccinated against Covid-19. Only 31% of pregnant people have been vaccinated, according to CDC data, and thousands of pregnant women and new mothers have ended up in the hospital because of the virus. Overall, however, the numbers of Covid-19 deaths and hospitalizations are projected to decrease over the next four weeks -- the first anticipated decline since June. Currently, an average of nearly 2,000 people die and about 114,000 people are infected with Covid-19 every day, according to data from Johns Hopkins University. And if you're wondering whether you're eligible for a booster shot and should get the jab, CNN Medical Analyst Dr. Leana Wen has some expert advice.

**** AstraZeneca to use new vax technology to treat cancer, heart disease.***

UK drugmaker AstraZeneca has partnered with scientists at Imperial College London to develop a new vaccine technology to treat cancer, heart conditions and other non-infectious diseases and illnesses.
The technology was originally intended for targeting Covid-19, and works by delivering genetic material called self-amplifying RNA to human cells. The cells are then trained to recognise and respond to infection, The Independent reported.
Imperial scientists had aimed to use the technology to design a Covid-19 jab. However, it never progressed further than stage two clinical testing.
"We have clinical data that is good for the technology but it needs to be improved on," Prof Professor Robin Shattock, an immunologist at Imperial, was quoted as saying. "AstraZeneca wants to take our approach and advance it.
They see the potential of the platform."
Besides creating a protective layer of antibodies and T-cells against the spike protein structure found on the surface of SARS-CoV-2, the unique platform uses self-amplifying RNA to also make copies of itself once injected into humans, generating more of the original message.
The team hopes the same technique can be used to teach the body to identify other foreign threats or internal malfunctions, such as cancer, and then neutralise them via trained immunological cells.
Shattock said his team, alongside experts at AstraZeneca, would be working to apply the self-amplifying RNA to a range of disease areas.
He said there were no plans for human trials at this stage, with the immediate focus on first optimising the vaccine platform in the lab and determining whether it will be successful in treating the likes of cancer or heart disease.
The agreement with AstraZeneca will support the Imperial team with research and development funding for up to 26 different drug targets, the report said.
"We have all seen how technologies based around RNA have been fundamental to preventing ongoing severe disease and death in major global pandemics," said Prof Shattock.
"The prospect of further therapeutic applications adds to this technology's great potential."

COVID19: Weekly Update.

 # The numbers below are from
Saturday 10-02-2021 * 12pm US East coast Time...
Compiled Periodically By:

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South Asian Media Network Inc., USA.

There are likely false data & variations in data most of the time, so, Please use the data wisely. Details are compiled from various sources.
Marked "*" are not reliable data.

World:
235,252,166. Cases. / 4,808,766. Deaths.

Recovered till today:
212,020,665.

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01. U.S. A.:
44,449,105. Cases. /719,037. Deaths.

02. India(???)**
33,799,047. Cases. / 448,719. Deaths.

03. Brazil:
21,459,117 Cases. /597,749. Deaths.

05. UK:
7,871,014. Cases. /136,910. Deaths.

27. Canada.
1,630,573. Cases. /27,933. Deaths.

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00 (India): Gujarat* :(???)
825,952. (???) Cases. /10,082. (???) Deaths.

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USA States:

01. California:
4,641,369. Cases./ 69,416. Deaths

02. Texas*:
4,077,280. Cases. /65,963. Deaths.

03. Florida:
3,622,653. Cases / 55,011. Deaths.

04. New York:*
2,510,039. Cases / 55,974. Deaths.

05. Illinois:
1,630,864. Cases. / 27,714. Deaths.

06. Georgia:
1,582,063 Cases. / 26,242. Deaths.

07: Pennsylvania:
1,438,684. Cases / 29,546. Deaths.

08. Ohio
1,420,206 Cases / 22,273. Deaths.

12. New Jersey*:
1,156,243. Cases. / 27,443. Deaths.

19. Massachusetts:
813,599. Cases. / 18,647. Deaths.

34. Connecticut:
391,066. Cases /8,629. Deaths.

COVID19: DOS AND DON'TS.

***More than 4** Covid19 vaccines are available now nationwide in the US. Find out how to get yours.

The third booster dose(for Pfizer and Moderna, and also a second booster for Jhonsons'.) More serious Delta and Delta Plus (Indian), Lambda, now Kappa, Mue and now a Japanies verients are around & can create an another pendamic, so be careful & follow religeously the Guidelines given by the Medical Authorities of your country.

***** Finally Vaccine is available all time in the US; India and many parts of world, many of us got both the doses, or single dose in case of Jhonson & Jhonson's vaccine. Yet post vaccination results/effects are not known to the research/medico community fully. We are still in a Pandemic Period, of Phase 2 and 3, also possible invasion of new 4 or more strains of UK, Brazil, South Africa, and now India Coronavirus.

* Entering the new wave of Delta and Delta Plus and three other virus varients, the number of cases are still on a higher side, yet to achive the flat curve, world over most of us are just ignoring the pandemic do's & don'ts, particularly when we are with festivity mode in Summer days of 2021, so please take Extreme Care, Stay Safe & Stay Home. Yet not an easy time for every one! * Corona is still around, & may remain lifelong! It's not as simple as viral flu. It's as dangerous as like a contest of survival of the fittest.

* Vaccine third does is available now, first to the frontline medico fraternity, patients in need, & nursing home/long term care facilities residents on a priority, so be careful & protect yourself & your loved ones for good. Mask, frequent hand wash with soap & social distancing only is the option for now

* **Now Mask is not needed in the USA, if you are vaccinated.** But it is advised one must use Mask, even if you have taken Covid shots, Vaccine is just protection, it's not a cure! Also wear Gloves, Sunglasses & the most important: keep safe distance, keep washing your hands frequently with soap or use reliable sanitizer either one at least for 30 seconds.

**** In India nasal steam (Naas) is recommended by the Government authorities, Ayurvedic practitioners, & also is a traditional remedy, but the US CDC and other Western Health Authorities doesn't recommend it due to a probable risk to the brain.***

**** If you can, use Mouth Rinse, twice a day, will help to boost your oral health.***

**** If you have young kids/minors attending the school or college, it's advised to put on the mask for everyone inside the home.***

* We are passing through a tough time of Life & Death. Follow Social Distancing, but stay in for Social Contacts. If you know any one suffering with Corona, your nearer or dearer, call and talk to them frequently, we don't know whether they will return safely with us. Call other relatives/friends, at least ten persons a week. We are social & want to take care of those who are cut off due to Corona self-imposed lockdowns. Also keep busy yourself & family members with plenty of daily activities like yog, exercise & Stay Physically Fit, Pursue Your Hobby, Get Adequate, at least 6 to 8 hrs. of Sleep, & Eat Healthy Balance Diet.

*** Yet it's a long march to finish, no one knows when we will...!!!!!**

Take care, & Stay Safe.