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Protection From New COVID-19 Vaccines Drops Sharply Within Months: CDC

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4-6 minutes

The new COVID-19 vaccines provide a boost to protection against hospitalization but that shielding wanes within months, according to unpublished data presented on Feb. 24.

A bivalent [Pfizer](#) or [Moderna](#) booster increased protection against hospitalization initially by 52 percent, but that protection dropped to 36 percent beyond 59 days, U.S. [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) researchers said.

The researchers separately looked at the protection people who had received two or more monovalent doses, or doses of the original vaccines, and no bivalent booster. They found that people aged 18 to 64 had just 19 percent protection against COVID-19 associated hospitalization and those aged 65 and older had just 28 percent protection.

That means the protection after two months was around 60 percent in total for the elderly and goes below 50 percent for all other adults.

The data [came](#) from the CDC's VISION network.

Data from a different CDC-run network, called IVY, showed “minimal to no residual protection” against hospitalization from the original vaccine, Dr. Amadea Britton, a CDC official, said.

Two or more monovalent doses provided just 17 percent protection, with uncertain confidence intervals.

A bivalent vaccine on top of a monovalent

primary series brought the protection to just 55 percent at seven or more days after the booster.

Waning wasn't measured in the IVY network.

The bivalent vaccines were authorized and recommended in the fall of 2022 despite no clinical trial data being available. Clinical efficacy data remains unavailable at present.

The COVID-19 vaccines are authorized in the United States to prevent COVID-19 disease but officials have increasingly described the goal of vaccination as preventing severe disease, because the vaccines have performed worse and worse against symptomatic infection as newer variants have emerged.

The effectiveness against severe disease may be higher than against hospitalization, according to Britton.

A third CDC network, Increasing Community Access to Testing, found that a new booster initially provided 65 percent protection against symptomatic infection for children aged 5 to 11,

and 68 percent protection for children aged 12 to 17.

That protection waned to 54 percent by three months in the younger group and 53 percent by five months in the older group.

A bivalent booster worked much worse in adults, according to other unpublished data from the network presented for the first time during the meeting.

A bivalent increased protection against symptomatic infection by just 38 percent in the elderly, with protection dropping to 21 percent by five months. In people aged 50 to 64, protection started at 46 percent and waned to 28 percent; among adults aged 18 to 49, protection started at 51 percent and waned to 41 percent.

The protection estimates were relative, being measured against two to four doses of an original vaccine. Previous research has found that the original vaccine provides little protection against symptomatic Omicron infection, with

some estimating the protection turning negative over time.

“The pattern of waning against symptomatic infection is very similar to what was observed after monovalent booster doses, with VE against symptomatic infection decreasing to minimal protection by around five to six months,” Britton said.

Change in Vaccine

The updated Pfizer and Moderna vaccines target the BA.4 and BA.5 subvariants of Omicron, in addition to the Wuhan strain. The original vaccines were aimed at only the latter.

The updated vaccines are only available currently as booster shots.

U.S. authorities are preparing to replace all of the original Pfizer and Moderna vaccines with the bivalent. Advisers to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration [backed the move](#) in a recent meeting, and advisers to the CDC on Thursday

largely agreed the move would be good.

They cited the improvement in protection the bivalents bestow, however minimal, and the hope that simplifying the vaccines would lead to more uptake.

Many Americans have declined to get any boosters, and even fewer have received one of the new bivalents. The overwhelming majority of parents have chosen not to get their children even a primary series, amid the drop in effectiveness and growing concerns about short- and long-term side effects like heart inflammation.