

Pfizer vaccine likely works against UK variant

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The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine appears to be effective against the new more infectious coronavirus variant that was first detected in Britain and has since been found in dozens of countries, according to two preliminary studies released Wednesday.

The strain, known as B.1.1.7, has caused alarm among experts because of its increased ability to spread and supercharge [virus outbreaks](#).

It is one of several concerning new variants—each with a cluster of genetic mutations—that have emerged in recent weeks.

Researchers on Wednesday said that their early findings, which have yet to be peer reviewed, suggested that the variant would not be able to evade the protective effect of current vaccines.

"Our results suggest that the majority of vaccine responses should be effective against the B.1.1.7 variant," concluded researchers from Britain and the Netherlands in one of the studies.

The authors tested the new variant in the laboratory with antibody-rich blood plasma from 36 patients who had recovered from either mild or severe or forms of COVID-19.

Most were able to neutralize the variant, although the study found reduced potency in three samples.

"Our findings stress the importance of continuous monitoring of variants and in vitro assessment of their impact on neutralization," they said.

A separate preliminary study by researchers from BioNTech and Pfizer also found their vaccine to be effective against the B.1.1.7 variant.

They compared the neutralizing effect of plasma from 16 participants in their vaccine clinical trials against the British variant and the original virus that emerged in Wuhan, China in late 2019.

They found an "equivalent" neutralization capacity to both variants, concluding it was "unlikely" the B.1.1.7 variant could escape the immune protection of the vaccine.

The authors added that it would be "prudent" to prepare for the possibility that virus strains will develop beyond the reach of the current vaccine.

But they added that the flexibility of the technology of the messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine would allow it to be adapted to new strains relatively quickly.

In previous preliminary research from Pfizer/BioNTech released earlier this month, scientists found the [vaccine](#) was effective against a mutation, N501Y, common to the virus variants found in Britain, South Africa and Brazil.

This mutation involves a change in the virus's spike protein, which enables it to latch onto human cells and therefore plays a key role in infection.

But it is yet another mutation, known as E484K and present in the variants detected in South Africa and Brazil, but not the one from Britain, that has experts particularly worried about immunity "escape".

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