

# Possible COVID-19 vaccine breakthrough makes measures to stop virus spread now more urgent

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The announcement from Pfizer and German partner BioNTech Monday that there has been progress in the development of an effective vaccine against COVID-19 is a promising and encouraging development. It makes all the more necessary urgent measures to contain the spread of the virus and save lives until a vaccine is widely available.

Pfizer announced that patients in clinical trials who received two injections of the vaccine, spaced three weeks apart, had 90 percent fewer cases of COVID-19 than a control group. By way of comparison, the typical yearly flu vaccine is only 40–60 percent effective.

The findings were based on initial data from a clinical trial of over 43,538 participants, which were reviewed by an independent board, but which have not yet been made public. The company intends to file for an emergency use authorization once half of the participants in the study have been observed for safety issues for at least two months, sometime in the third week of November.

If approved, Pfizer's vaccine (as well as that being developed by rival Moderna) would be the first mRNA vaccine in widespread use. This would open a new age for the rapid treatment of infectious diseases with a whole new class of low-cost vaccines.

The progress toward a vaccine is encouraging news. However, significant questions and issues remain.

In its report on the vaccine, medical journal *Stat* noted that “there is no information yet on whether the vaccine prevents severe cases, the type that can cause hospitalization and death. Nor is there any information yet on whether it prevents people from carrying the virus that causes Covid-19, SARS-CoV-2, without symptoms.” The latter would be critical in determining

how effective the vaccine is in lowering transmission rates.

It is also still too early to say how long the vaccine protects against infection. *Stat* also noted that the results announced by Pfizer and BioNTech have not yet been peer reviewed by scientists or published in a medical journal.

Provided that the initial results hold, even under the best of conditions Pfizer said that only 50 million doses will be available by the end of the year, with 1.3 billion produced in 2021. The vaccine must be stored at super-cold temperatures, which could make it extremely difficult to deliver to many places.

The availability and distribution of the vaccine, moreover, will be hampered by the subordination of production to the profit motives of the giant pharmaceutical companies and the conflicting interests of competing nation-states.

That being said, it does appear that progress is being made. Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Dr. Anthony Fauci, noted that the initial results from Pfizer also bode well for the vaccine being developed by biotechnology firm Moderna and the National Institutes of Health based on similar technology. The Russian health ministry issued a statement indicating its Sputnik V vaccine would also be over 90 percent effective.

All of this means that an effective vaccine will likely be available for broad distribution sometime next year.

The progress toward a vaccine makes all the more criminal the policy of “herd immunity” that is being implemented by governments throughout the world. As one begins to see light at the end of the tunnel, the argument that it is necessary to “live with the virus”

becomes absolutely unacceptable.

News of the vaccine comes as the pandemic is surging in the United States and Europe. The US has surpassed 10 million cases, and, within a matter of days, a quarter million people will have died in the United States alone. As of Monday, 43 states reported 10 percent more new COVID-19 cases than the week before.

Despite this disaster, there is no plan to contain the pandemic. US President Donald Trump, who remains in office for at least two-and-a-half more months, has publicly advocated “herd immunity,” all but declaring that the spread of the disease is a positive good. President-elect Joe Biden has rejected calls for more widespread lockdowns.

While the UK, France and Germany have announced minor restrictions on bars and gyms, they have categorically refused to close non-essential workplaces like factories and schools.

The current catastrophic state of the pandemic is the direct consequence of the fact that government policy has been determined not by public health but by the interests of profit. Once the bailout of the banks was secured in March, the ruling class worked to implement its back-to-work policy.

As a result, hundreds of thousands have died. If emergency action is not taken now, hundreds of thousands more will die before a vaccine is widely available.

The senseless loss of life must be stopped! Non-essential businesses must be closed, with full compensation for all lost wages for workers and income for small businesspeople due to the pandemic. The terrible trade-off between risking one’s life and one’s livelihood cannot be accepted.

Where production is essential to the functioning of society, safe working conditions must be overseen by workers’ rank-and-file safety committees and health care professionals, with no concern for corporate profit.

There must be a massive investment in public health infrastructure, including universal testing, contact tracing and free treatment for all. Once a vaccine is available, it must be freely distributed and not subject to the profit interests of private corporations or the competition of nation-states.

The working class must now intervene to ensure that hundreds of thousands do not needlessly die in the

coming weeks and months because the capitalists must have their profits.



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