

Having flu and COVID together doubles death risk in hospitalized patients

22 September 2020, by Robin Foster, E.j. Mundell



While health officials worry about a potential "twindemic" of COVID-19 and the flu this winter, a new study finds that hospital patients who were infected with both viruses were more than twice as likely to die as those infected only with the new coronavirus.

British government scientists conducted the research during the early months of the pandemic, and the results were troubling: 43% of patients who were hospitalized with both infections died, compared with 26.9% of people who were hospitalized for [coronavirus infection](#) alone, the *Washington Post* reported.

While the study only followed 58 people between the months of January and April, the findings line up with similar research that is underway, the *Post* reported.

"If you get both, you are in some serious trouble, and the people who are most likely to get both of these infections may be the very people who can

least afford to in terms of their own immune system, or their risk for serious outcomes," Yvonne Doyle, Public Health England's medical director, said in an agency news release. She urged people considered high-risk to go for a flu shot if they were eligible.

"The [flu vaccine](#) is more important than ever, to help reduce transmission of flu and protect the nation from the double threat of flu and COVID-19," Doyle said.

As for a COVID-19 [vaccine](#), some U.S. pediatricians are warning that a coronavirus vaccine for children might not arrive before the fall of 2021. While scientists are racing to develop a vaccine for adults, no one has started the process for children, *The New York Times* reported.

"Right now, I'm pretty worried that we won't have a vaccine available for kids by the start of next school year," Dr. Evan Anderson, a pediatrician at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, told the *Times*.

Anderson and his colleagues recently published a commentary in the journal *Clinical Infectious Diseases* in which they called for vaccine makers to address the issue.

Many vaccines, including ones for measles, polio and tetanus, were developed to be given to children. In such cases, vaccine makers typically start with trials in adults to check for any safety issues, and then move on to testing in children, the *Times* reported.

Anderson said that vaccine makers could have started running trials for children over the summer, as soon as they had good results in adults. But that has not happened, and when these trials do start it could take a year or more to ready a coronavirus vaccine for children, Anderson said.

Coronavirus distribution plan unveiled

Meanwhile, the details of a plan to rapidly deliver a future coronavirus vaccine to Americans has been unveiled by federal.

Two of the key parts of the plan are to begin distributing a vaccine with 24 hours of any approval or emergency authorization and offering the vaccine for free, the *Times* reported.

Officials from Operation Warp Speed—the multiagency effort created to quickly vaccinate Americans against coronavirus—also said the timing of a vaccine was still unclear, the *Times* reported. That is despite repeated statements from President Donald Trump that a shot could be ready before the election on Nov. 3.

"We're dealing in a world of great uncertainty. We don't know the timing of when we'll have a vaccine, we don't know the quantities, we don't know the efficacy of those vaccines," Paul Mango, the deputy chief of staff for policy at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, told the *Times*. "This is a really quite extraordinary, logistically complex undertaking, and a lot of uncertainties right now."

Who will get the vaccine first? Initial distribution of a vaccine, possibly on an emergency basis, would to a limited group of high-priority people, such as health care workers, in the final three months of this year and into next year, the *Times* reported. The Department of Defense is providing logistical support for shipping and storing the vaccine, and for keeping track of who has gotten a vaccine and whether they got the full two doses, the newspaper said.

To achieve this, existing databases would be linked up so that, for example, a patient who received a vaccine at a public health center in January could go to a CVS pharmacy 28 days later in another state and be assured of getting the second dose of the right vaccine, the *Times* reported.

Right now, three [drug makers](#) are testing vaccine candidates in late-stage trials in the United States. One of those companies, Pfizer, has said that it could apply for emergency authorization as early as October, while the other two, Moderna and AstraZeneca, have said they hope to have

something before the end of the year.

In a sign that the Pfizer vaccine trials are moving along smoothly, German pharmaceutical company BioNTech, which is developing a coronavirus vaccine with Pfizer, announced recently it was buying a new production plant so it can ramp up production of a COVID-19 vaccine when needed, *CNN* reported.

New Drug May Help Prevent Severe COVID

A single infusion of an experimental drug dramatically lowers levels of coronavirus in the bodies of newly infected patients and cuts their chances of hospitalization, the drug's maker has reported.

Eli Lilly's announcement did not include detailed data and hasn't been peer-reviewed or published yet, the *Times* reported.

The news comes from interim results of a trial sponsored by Eli Lilly and the U.S. National Institutes of Health. NIH officials would not comment on the announcement until they have seen more detailed data from the trial, the *Times* reported.

How does the drug work its magic? It is a monoclonal antibody, a manmade copy of an antibody produced by a patient who recovered from COVID-19, the *Times* reported. Scientists around the world have high hopes that that [monoclonal antibodies](#) will prove to be powerful coronavirus treatments, but they come with a caveat: They are difficult to manufacture, and would take time to produce, the *Times* reported.

In the trial, 452 newly diagnosed COVID patients received the monoclonal antibody or a placebo infusion. Some 1.7 percent of those who got the drug were hospitalized, compared with 6 percent of those who received a placebo—a 72 percent reduction in risk, Eli Lilly said.

At the same time, blood levels of the coronavirus plummeted among those who received the drug, and their symptoms were fewer and milder, the *Times* reported.

This is the first treatment aimed at patients who are not already seriously ill and hospitalized, the newspaper added. coronavirus case count has passed 1.1 million, the *Times* reported. As of Tuesday, the [death toll](#) in Russia was over 19,500.

Dr. Myron Cohen, director of the Institute for Global Health and Infectious Diseases at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, told the *Times* he was impressed by the findings. Worldwide, the number of reported infections passed 31.3 million on Tuesday, with over 965,000 deaths, according to the Hopkins tally.

"It's exciting," said Cohen, who was not involved in the study. The trial appears to be rigorous, and the results are "really compelling," he added. Other monoclonal antibody drugs to combat the coronavirus are in development, he noted.

More information: The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has more on the [new coronavirus](#).

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Cases keep mounting

By Tuesday, the U.S. coronavirus case count passed 6.8 million as the death toll passed 199,700, according to a *Times* tally.

According to the same tally, the top five states in coronavirus cases as of Tuesday were: California with over 792,000; Texas with more than 744,700; Florida with over 685,000; New York with more than 455,000; and Georgia with nearly 290,000.

Curbing the spread of the coronavirus in the rest of the world remains challenging.

By Tuesday, India's coronavirus case count had passed 5.5 million, just over one month after hitting the 3 million mark, the *Times* reported.

Nearly 89,000 coronavirus patients have died in India, but when measured as a proportion of the population, the country has had far fewer deaths than many others. Doctors say this reflects India's younger and leaner population.

Still, the country's public health system is severely strained, and some sick patients cannot find hospital beds, the newspaper said. Only the United States has more coronavirus cases.

Meanwhile, Brazil posted over 4.5 million cases and more than 137,000 deaths as of Tuesday, the *Times* tally showed.

Cases are also spiking in Russia: The country's

APA citation: Having flu and COVID together doubles death risk in hospitalized patients (2020, September 22) retrieved 31 May 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-09-flu-covid-death-hospitalized-patients.html>

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