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FDA Approves Booster mRNA Covid Shots for Certain Immunocompromised

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In what is likely to be a wider effort to better protect against the rise of Covid-19 variants such as Delta, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration late Thursday approved booster Covid-19 vaccine shots from Pfizer and Moderna — two of three Covid-19 vaccines approved in the U.S. — for immunocompromised people who had received a solid organ transplant or persons who have been diagnosed with conditions that are considered to be equal to a compromised immune system.

FDA Acting Commissioner Janet Woodcock said, “After a thorough review of the available data, the FDA determined that this small, vulnerable group may benefit from a third dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech or Moderna Vaccines.” She said while the FDA is reviewing approving an additional dose, it was not needed at this time.

The approval follows evidence that the vaccines are not as effective at protecting people with weak immune systems. According to the Wall Street Journal, which cited studies, immunocompromised people who didn't have an antibody response after two doses of the mRNA vaccines had responses after a third dose, supporting the decision to recommend a third dose.

"This action is about ensuring our most vulnerable, who may need an additional dose to enhance their biological responses to the vaccines, are better protected against Covid-19," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Rochelle Walensky said.

She added, "An additional dose could help increase protection for these individuals, which is especially important as the Delta variant spreads."

WSJ said the expanded authorization is expected to be the first step in a broader campaign to get ahead of the evolving coronavirus, which has mutated into more contagious strains.

Covid-19 continues to mutate, and this has undermined attempts from governments around the world to leave the pandemic behind after vaccination was appearing to be the means by which authorities would abandon restrictive measures aimed at taming the virus.

The Delta variant has proven to be the most disruptive, evading vaccines and causing a higher rate of transmission among the unvaccinated. First detected in India, the variant is now the dominant strain of Covid-19 in the U.S., and has led to the reimposing of mask mandates and even mandatory vaccination policies.