

Israel COVID cases break another two-month record - Israel News - Haaretz.com

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Israel's Health Ministry registered 148 new coronavirus cases on Wednesday, the highest daily increase since May, as the infectious delta variant makes further headway across the country. [Israel decided to reinstate indoor mask mandate](#) as of next week.

A senior official with Pfizer Israel said Thursday that the company's vaccine is 90 percent effective in preventing symptomatic coronavirus cases, and 95 percent effective in preventing serious cases that require hospitalization. However, the effectivity of the vaccine in preventing infection and transmission is still unclear.

The northern city of Binyamina has been declared "red" on Israel's so-called traffic light system, reflecting a relatively high rate of coronavirus infection, [amid a new uptick in cases](#).

Prof. Ran Balicer, the chief of the professional coronavirus cabinet which advises the Israel's coronavirus cabinet, told Kan public radio that he believes that there will be more localities to face restrictions in the coming days, but played down the prospects of a further lockdown.

Earlier, Prof. Chezy Levy, the director general of the Health Ministry, told the radio station that the ministry will soon know the breakdown of the numbers – how many of those diagnosed had returned from abroad, for instance, and how many were unvaccinated children. But, he added that "the wave of infections is continuing regardless."

When asked how many of the [new coronavirus patients](#) have been

vaccinated, Levy said that "We're looking at a rate of 40 to 50 percent," and said that the figure is concerning.

"Even though the numbers are low, the fact that this is reaching vaccinated people means...that we are still checking how many vaccinated people have also been infected," Levy added.

- [Explained: Is Israel facing another COVID-19 wave as the delta variant spreads?](#)
- [To curb spread of COVID delta variant, Israel turns focus to two missions](#)
- [Israel delays letting in tourists in effort to contain COVID delta strain](#)

The increased infection is attributed to the spread of the delta variant of the coronavirus in the country – a strain first identified in India. The World Health Organization says it is becoming the globally dominant version of the virus.

Pfizer jab effective against delta

Also on Thursday, Alon Rappaport, Pfizer's medical director in Israel, told Army Radio that the Pfizer-BioNTech coronavirus vaccine is highly effective against the variant.

"The data we have today, accumulating from research we are conducting at the lab and including data from those places where the Indian variant, delta, has replaced the British variant as the common variant, point to our vaccine being very effective, around 90 percent, in preventing the coronavirus disease, COVID-19," Rappaport said.

How well does the Pfizer vaccine prevent infection and transmission of the delta variant remains an open question. In March, a collaborative research by Maccabi and the Technion found that the Pfizer vaccine was

91 percent effective against infection of the British variant of the virus, which was then the dominant strain in Israel. However, there isn't enough data yet about the delta variant, which is about 60 percent more contagious than the British one.

"We know that the delta variant is a lot more contagious than the British one or the original virus but there is still disagreement about how virulent it is, meaning, how aggressive it is; we'll need to wait for further data," Rapaport said. He added that Pfizer is not considering developing a customized vaccine for the delta variant just yet.

A spokesperson for Pfizer did not immediately respond to a request for comment when asked to provide further details.

"We are collecting the data now. We are only now seeing the first cases of the Delta variant in Israel – about 200 of those – so we will know more soon," she told reporters on Wednesday.

In light of the increased infection, which has been attributed to the spread of the delta variant of the coronavirus in the country, Israel has [postponed the date when tourists will be allowed](#) to enter the country from July to August. It was also decided that municipal inspectors will assist in enforcing quarantine regulations.

Levy said on Wednesday that people who came into contact with a carrier of a "dangerous strain" can be ordered to go into quarantine, even if they are inoculated. Masks will also be made compulsory at airports, border crossings, and medical facilities.

Also on Wednesday, the Health Ministry said that it recommends wearing masks indoors, while Prime Minister Naftali Bennett announced that this would become mandatory again if coronavirus infections continue to rise.

Following consultations with professional experts, Bennett and Health

Minister Nitzan Horowitz agreed to launch a campaign to vaccinate people between the ages of 12 and 15. There are 600,000 12-15 year-olds in Israel.

The Health Ministry announced the campaign will go ahead after a study on a possible link between the vaccine and heart inflammation in young males, a condition known as myocarditis, found that the risks of myocarditis are minor compared with those of COVID-19.

According to the study's findings, the second dose of the COVID vaccine was linked to cases of myocarditis in males aged 16-30, with the risk decreasing with age. Most myocarditis cases linked to the vaccine were mild and lasted only a few days.

The number of remaining vaccine doses isn't publicized, but some figures estimate Israel has about 1.5 million doses. According to a statement by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, the doses will expire on July 9. Asked whether Pfizer will expedite shipping of vaccines to Israel if the need arises, Rapaport said: "We in Pfizer Israel will do everything we can in cooperation with the Health Ministry and the global Pfizer teams so that Israeli citizens will have the vaccine."

Britain: More infections, less hospitalizations

The effectivity of a vaccine includes a number of important factors which can be crucial both for the individual and for the wider management of the pandemic.

Generally speaking, the spread of a virus entails two steps: first, infection – meaning, the penetration of SARS-CoV-2 into the body following exposure; second, morbidity – the symptoms of Covid-19 caused by the activity and replication of the virus within the body. Any change in these steps can have serious ramifications.

Data on the spread and morbidity of the new strain in Britain illustrates how differently the two factors influence the effectiveness of the vaccine. Over the last few weeks the delta variant became particularly dominant in Britain, leading to an uptick in confirmed cases. On May 22, there were 1,739 confirmed cases daily; a month later, the number spiked to 10,149, despite the progress of the vaccination campaign. However, the number of hospitalization dropped from 1,800 to 1,300 in the same time period.

One explanation for the data is the disparity between the vaccination's ability to prevent infection and its effectivity in preventing the replication of the virus within the body and its general effects on the respiratory and immune systems.

Reuters contributed to this report.

