

U.S. CDC backs COVID-19 boosters for at-risk workers and elderly

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The World Health Organization has called for a global moratorium on COVID-19 boosters amid global disparities [File: Robert F Bukaty/AP Photo]

Atlanta, September 25 (RHC)-- The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has endorsed Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for individuals at high risk of exposure because of their

jobs, in a move that overrules the recommendation by its own panel of health experts.

CDC director Rochelle Walensky said the agency had to act on “complex, often imperfect data” for the greater good of public health. “In a pandemic, even with uncertainty, we must take actions that we anticipate will do the greatest good,” she said in a statement on Friday.

The CDC also backed the panel’s recommendation of booster shots for people aged above 65 and some with underlying medical conditions. “I believe we can best serve the nation’s public health needs by providing booster doses for the elderly, those in long-term care facilities, people with underlying medical conditions, and for adults at high risk of disease from occupational and institutional exposures,” Walensky said.

The recommendations are only for people who had their vaccine doses at least six months ago. That means about 26 million people in the United States are eligible for a third jab, the CDC said, including about 13 million people aged 65 and older.

The decision comes after Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on Wednesday approved Pfizer booster shots for a broader swath of the US public. Those workers eligible because of a higher risk of COVID-19 exposure include teachers, grocery store employees, healthcare workers and prisoners.

A day before the CDC recommendation, its expert committee voted against offering booster shots to workers in the higher risk category, adding to the confusion around the campaign. The hours-long debate left several experts torn, as the scientific community has so far failed to reach a consensus on whether a coronavirus vaccine booster shot is necessary at this time.

Some experts have concerns about the lack of data on the efficacy and safety of adding another shot to the Pfizer vaccine regimen. The original two doses are still proving successful at keeping the vast majority of their recipients out of the hospital with coronavirus, they say.

The World Health Organization, meanwhile, has called for a global moratorium on booster shots as large swaths of the world remain without widespread access to initial doses of the vaccine.

Global health experts fear the unequal distribution of vaccines creates an opportunity for new, possibly vaccine resistant, variants to emerge.

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