

EU recommends second COVID booster for over-60s amid cases surge

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Brussels, July 11 (RHC)-- European Union health agencies on Monday recommended a second COVID-19 booster for everyone above 60 amid a new rise in infections and hospitalizations across Europe. While the existing coronavirus vaccines continue to provide good protection against hospitalization and death, vaccine effectiveness has taken a hit as the virus has evolved.

"It is crucial that everyone above 60 and all vulnerable persons come forth for a second booster dose as quickly as possible," EU health commissioner Stella Kyriakides said in a statement. EU health agencies have since April recommended a second booster only for those older than 80 and the most vulnerable.

The new recommendation is expected to facilitate national decisions to speed up vaccination campaigns, which have been slowing to nearly a halt in recent months. "We are currently seeing increasing COVID-

19 case notification rates and an increasing trend in hospital and ICU admissions and occupancy in several countries mainly driven by the BA.5 sublineage of Omicron," said Dr Andrea Ammon, the director of ECDC, in a statement.

Vaccine makers, such as Moderna Inc and partners Pfizer Inc and BioNTech have been testing versions of their vaccines modified to combat the BA.1 Omicron variant. Although they have said those vaccines generated a good immune response against BA.1 and the more recently circulating variants, they did see a lower response against BA.4 and BA.5.

The EMA, which is currently reviewing two variant-adapted vaccines, expects to have the first next-gen vaccines approved by September. "In the meantime, it is important to consider using currently authorized vaccines as second boosters in people who are most vulnerable," said Emir Cooke, European Medicines Agency executive director.

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