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Covid-19: Will the vaccine protect me from Omicron?

Keith Lynch · 05:00, Jan 10 2022



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Stuff's Whole Truth project has published over 50 articles examining misinformation about the Covid-19 vaccine. These are the most common themes. (Te Reo subtitles.)

As Omicron continues to proliferate at astonishing rates, Keith Lynch explains that Covid-19 vaccines very much do work against the new variant.

Why do I need to get a booster if I still have T cells?

OK. Number one: a third dose will bring about a new wave of eager antibodies that will reduce the chances of you catching Omicron (and Delta) in the first place.

That's not all. A booster will also induce a process called "affinity maturation", Priddy explains. This essentially means after repeated exposure to the vaccine (or indeed the virus) the immune system improves itself. It becomes more refined and better able to fight back.

Dr Nikki Moreland, an Associate Professor in Infection and Immunity at the University of Auckland, equates this to studying something complicated.

When you read something the first time around, you kinda know what's going on. You read it again and your understanding improves. Then you read it for a third time and you really get it.

One question for immunologists is: how many doses will be needed in the long term?

And there may well be diminishing returns, Priddy says. A lot of childhood vaccines, for instance, involve three doses – five or six aren't necessary.

**MORE FROM
KEITH LYNCH • EXPLAINER EDITOR**

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Will the vaccines stop me from getting Omicron?

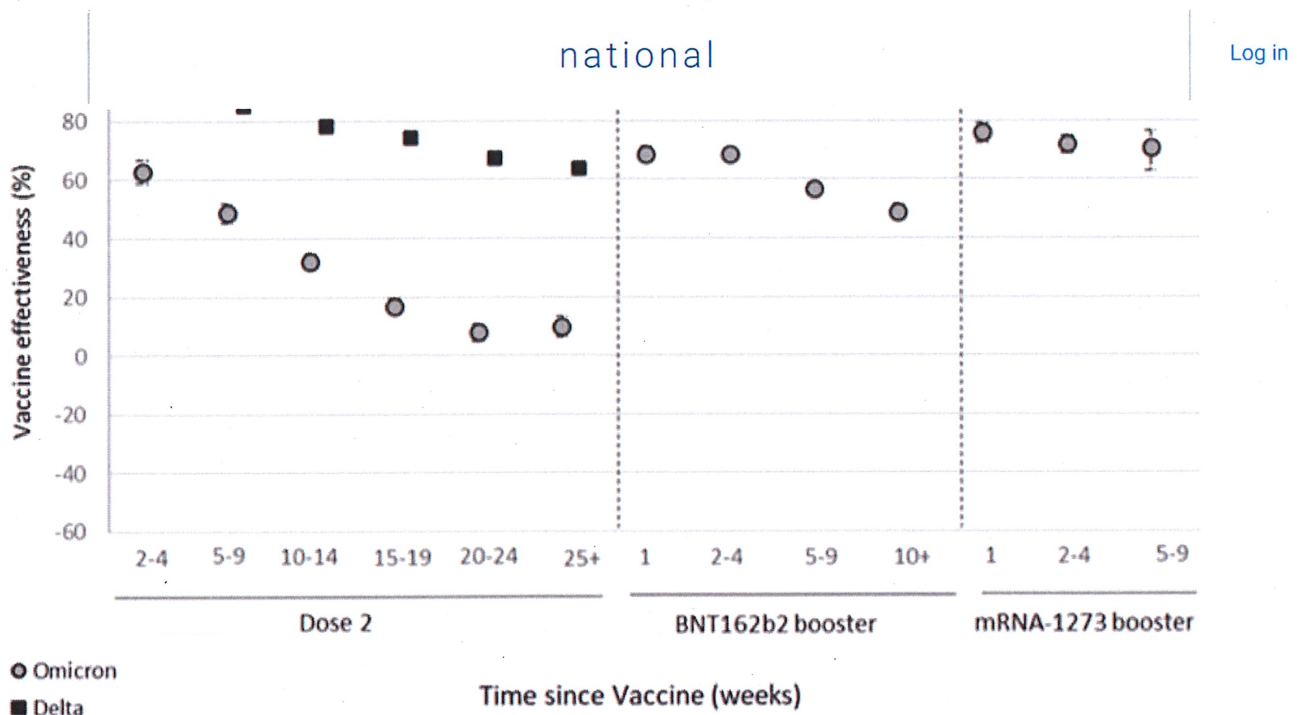
We'll start with the bad news.

For the reasons I've outlined above, two doses of the Pfizer vaccine offers less protection against symptomatic Omicron than with Delta, according to data from the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

Their January 6 technical report suggests that in those first few weeks after a second dose, the vaccine is about 60 per cent effective at halting mild illness.

There's a temporal aspect to this, too. That number drops after three-or-so months as the antibody numbers wane.

A booster certainly appears to ramp up protection from symptomatic illness, at least in the short term, as you see the dataset below.



That's not to say the vaccines won't stop some Omicron infections. **The new variant is just more likely to get around our first line of defence.**

A [recent Danish study](#) (yet to be peer-reviewed) supports these findings, suggesting that Omicron is much more adept at evading the protection the vaccines offer against infection.

The researchers wrote: "Our findings confirm that the rapid spread of the Omicron VOC primarily can be ascribed to the immune evasiveness rather than an inherent increase in the basic transmissibility."

There's another thing to consider here: If you're exposed to Omicron, there's a chance you could end up being infected with Covid-19 but have no symptoms.

Another [South African study](#) (also yet to be peer-reviewed) suggests that Omicron causes more asymptomatic cases than the other variants.

"This high prevalence of asymptomatic infection is likely a major factor in the widespread, rapid dissemination of the variant globally, even among populations with high prior rates of SARS-COV-2 infection," the researchers noted.

All of this helps explain its alarming spread.