



'Up in the air': 4th booster shot may not be needed, medical expert says

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COVID-19 hospitalizations have reached a new high due to the fast-spreading omicron variant, prompting government and health officials to urge people to get vaccinated and boosted against the virus.

Pfizer's CEO says a fourth dose may not be necessary, while Moderna's CEO says it may be needed. The conflicting statements are causing a lot of confusion.

Dr. Jeffrey Singer joined the National Desk Tuesday to discuss how likely it is Americans will need a fourth dose of the COVID vaccine to protect themselves.

“I think it's really too early to know if there's going to be a fourth shot needed. It looks like this omicron variant is so contagious — it's just tearing through the population. Fortunately, the good news is for those who have been fully vaccinated — and especially if you've been boosted — it looks like, overwhelmingly, it's just a minor, moderate cold and even if you haven't been vaccinated, it's mostly a mild cold-like illness,” Singer said. “The evidence is that people who get infected with omicron not only develop immunity to omicron, but it looks like they're also developing immunity to build the delta variant and previous variants. So whether or not they're going to need to get another boost is really up in the air right now.”

Scientists and researchers say the guidance is changing as more data comes out but in Massachusetts, officials are now changing the way they gather some of this data, switching how COVID hospitalizations are recorded to distinguish between patients admitted because of COVID-related complications or being admitted for other reasons and incidentally testing positive.

Singer says this is the way data should have been recorded from the start.

“I'm very disappointed that the CDC didn't take the time to try to sort out the data in this way. Just the other day, we all heard the governor of New York reported that 43% of hospitalized cases in New York are with COVID as opposed to being for COVID,” he said. “If we don't have accurate data, it's really a problem.”

As omicron continues to spread through the normal flu season, there have been reports of “flurona” and even “deltacron” — a combination of the two variants.

“It’s theoretically possible. Virologists will tell you there are rare circumstances where a person can be infected with two variants of the same virus at the same time and it depends on which variant replicates quicker within the person's system as to how bad the symptoms are going to be,” Singer said. “It's still it's very uncommon but it's definitely a possibility.”

But he says it’s not something people should be particularly concerned about, as research hasn’t shown the combination is presenting more of a danger.

“I think there were 14 cases where a person was believed to have been infected by both the delta and the omicron variant at the same time and while replicating their RNA they sort of intermingled and they created a new variant that has features of both,” Singer said. “A lot of highly respected virologists from around the world have looked at the report and they don't think it's a thing. They don't think it's anything to worry about.”