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Moderna's Updated Covid-19 Vaccine Shows Promising Results Against Pirola Variant; FDA Approval Pending

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Moderna on Thursday announced promising results from clinical trials of its updated Covid-19 vaccine, designed to combat emerging virus variants, including the concerning BA.2.86 (Pirola) strain.

The trials demonstrated an 8.7 to 11-fold increase in neutralizing antibodies against this variant, as well as against other circulating variants such as EG.5 and FL.1.5.1, according to the company.

The announcement comes ahead of the anticipated fall vaccination campaign, with approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration pending.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the BA.2.86 variant has a higher likelihood of breaking through the immunity conferred by previous Covid-19 vaccines or infections. This has intensified the need for an updated vaccine for the upcoming fall 2023 vaccination season, Moderna said. The company's clinical data appear to align with this priority, showcasing the vaccine's potential in reducing severe disease and hospitalizations.

Dr. Stephen Hoge, president of Moderna, expressed confidence in the newly-released data. "These results demonstrate that our updated Covid-19 vaccine generates a strong human immune response against the highly mutated BA.2.86 variant. Alongside previously communicated results showing effective responses against other key variants like EG.5 and FL.1.5.1, these data confirm that our updated Covid-19 vaccine will continue to be an important tool for protection as we head into the fall vaccination season," said Hoge.

Public health authorities have been closely monitoring the BA.2.86 variant due to its highly mutated nature, which includes over 30 mutations compared to prior Omicron strains. The new variant's potential to evade immunity has led to accelerated vaccination efforts worldwide.

Moderna has already shared its clinical trial data with regulatory agencies and has submitted the data for peer review publication. The company reiterated its commitment to rapidly assess global public health threats and leverage its mRNA platform to combat Covid-19 effectively.