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US to allow mix and match booster

WASHINGTON – The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is planning to allow Americans to receive a different COVID-19 vaccine as a booster than the one they initially received, a move that could reduce the appeal of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine and provide flexibility to doctors and other vaccinators.

The government would not recommend one shot over another, and it might note that using the same vaccine as a booster when possible is preferable, people familiar with the agency's planning said.

But vaccine providers could use their discretion to offer a different brand, a freedom that state health officials have been requesting for weeks.

The approach was foreshadowed last Friday, when researchers presented the findings of a federally funded "mix and match" study to an expert committee that advises the FDA.

The study found that recipients of Johnson & Johnson's single-dose shot who received a Moderna booster saw their antibody levels rise 76 times in 15 days, compared with only a fourfold increase after an extra dose of Johnson & Johnson.

Federal regulators this week are aiming to greatly expand the number of Americans eligible for booster shots.

The FDA is expected to authorize boosters of the Moderna and Johnson & Johnson vaccines by Wednesday evening; it could allow the mix-and-match approach by then.

The agency last month authorized booster shots of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, to be given at least six months after the second dose.

An advisory committee of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will take up the booster issue on Thursday; the agency will then issue its own recommendations. By the end of the week, tens of millions more Americans could be eligible for extra shots.

The study presented to the FDA's advisory panel last week, conducted by the National Institutes of Health, suggested that Johnson & Johnson recipients might benefit most from a booster shot of the Moderna vaccine. – NYT