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Advances in Vaccine Development Using mRNA Technology: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic

Saad Abdullah[1*], Naeem Haider [2], Dua Riaz[3]

[1]*Department of Pharmacy Practice, Faculty of Pharmacy, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan*
[2]*Lecturer, Punjab College Vehari, Punjab, Pakistan*
[3]*Services Institute of Medical Sciences, Lahore, Pakistan*
**Corresponding Author Email: saad_khan1@live.com*

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Abstract

The growth of mRNA vaccine technology led huge changes in health protection and immunology fields because of COVID-19. Our review focuses on important MRI vaccine advances especially from COVID-19related experiments. Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna developed mRNA vaccines that give excellent protection while being safe which lets these companies offer rapid production options at scale. Because mRNA vaccines can be developed in one week this new vaccine platform remains more exposed to emerging health threats than standard vaccines. The development of vaccines against multiple diseases including cancer and influenza has become achievable because of how well mRNA vaccines work against SARS-CoV-2. Although success has been made many challenges persist particularly with maintaining mRNA stability during distribution. The paper examines how nanoparticles particularly lipid nanoparticles (LNPs) increase the delivery of mRNA vaccines. This paper examines how mRNA vaccines hold great potential for preventing infections and treating medical conditions particularly cancer. It has been concluded that the COVID-19 pandemic made the world see the revolution mRNA vaccines could create while also showing why these vaccines are better than traditional platforms. Although Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna showed that their mRNA vaccines work well in trials they need modifications for better performance. Lipid nanoparticles became a critical method to solve delivery and stabilization challenges that come with mRNA vaccines. Next to fighting infectious diseases mRNA vaccines show promising benefits in treating cancer and improving custom treatment methods. The next stage of research must advance the performance of these vaccines for wider application. The creation of mRNA vaccines forms our best defense against emerging diseases as the world prepares for more outbreaks across nations.

INTRODUCTION

Our worldwide health system has improved because vaccinations help us fight against infectious diseases (*Plotkin S.A. Vaccines,2009)*. Traditional vaccination technology serves disease prevention well thanks to its use of protein components and special viral vectors or altered microorganisms (*Plotkin S.A. Vaccines,2009)*. Despite enabling high-volume vaccine manufacturing several platforms have limitations in speed and stability which affects scientific research on new diseases. mRNA vaccines represent recent technological breakthroughs that allow fast creation of targeted vaccines to fight infectious diseases especially viral outbreaks (*Pardi N., Hogan M.J,2018)*. mRNA vaccines serve as a fresh vaccination method by allowing human cells to develop target antigens (*Karikó K., Buckstein M., Ni H.2005)*. The new vaccine technology performs better than traditional vaccine platforms in multiple ways. The latest success of mRNA vaccines against SARS-CoV-2 research has created significant interest according to studies (*Polack F.P., Thomas S.J., Kitchin N., Absalon J., Gurtman A.,2020)*. Vaccines made from mRNA can be produced fast due to their main advantages. The production process for mRNA vaccines runs much faster than standard vaccine methods which require long and expensive steps thus allowing quick response to new diseases in their developing stages. Modifying only the mRNA sequences that encode antigens enables mRNA vaccines to adapt without difficulty when treating different illnesses. Due to high instability of mRNA molecules and their quick break down into their fragments it remains challenging to effectively deliver them into target cells. Nanoparticle technology now offers a useful way to deliver mRNA vaccines because it tackles common problems with raw mRNA particles (*Yin H., Kanasty R.L., Eltoukhy A.A., Vegas A.J., Dorkin J.R,2014)*. Small-scale carriers enable better cell absorption while stopping enzyme damage and control mRNA delivery within specific barriers of protection and transport. Researchers design nanoparticles to stabilize mRNA vaccines and extend their circulation in the body while steering these vaccines to specific immune cells for optimal outcomes (*Ramachandran S., Ranjan S,2022)*. Lipid-based nanotechnology stands as the preferred method to deliver mRNA vaccines to human cells. Coded mRNA travels within LNPs because these particles contain hydrophobic material that protects and transfers it to cells (*Pardi N., Hogan M.J., Pelc R.S., Muramatsu H,2017)*. Research teams developed effective mRNA vaccines for several viruses and COVID-19 using this technique (*Suzuki Y., Ishihara H,2021)*. LNPs show great promise in vaccination because they offer excellent safety performance and high efficiency when delivering RNA into cells while generating strong immune reactions.

Scientists study different types of nanoparticles such as peptides, protamine-based platforms and polymer nanoparticles for mRNA vaccine transportation. Nanoparticles offer unique advantages that benefit specific delivery methods and enhance materials they carry. The pliable polymer nanoparticles of biological and engineered materials help make mRNA immune to degradation (*Yang W., Mixich L., Boonstra E,2023)*. Ball-shaped protamine and peptide assemblies demonstrate unique cell membrane penetrating abilities according to research studies (*Udhayakumar V.K., De Beuckelaer A., McCaffrey J., McCrudden C.M., Kirschman J.L., Vanover D., Van Hoecke L., Roose K., Deswarte K., De Geest B.G., et al,2017)*

Nanoparticle mRNA vaccines hold major importance as they serve to protect against infectious diseases. Researchers see how mRNA technology can aid treatment of cancer, immunotherapy and genetic diseases plus other important healthcare problems (*Oberli M.A., Reichmuth A.M., Dorkin J.R., Mitchell M.J., Fenton O.S., Jaklenec A., Anderson D.G., Langer R,2017)*. Scientists use nanoparticles to fast produce mRNA vaccines as a ready measure against pandemic diseases (*Pardi N., Weissman D,2017)*.

Through this study we aim to explain all aspects of nano particle and delivery techniques for mRNA vaccines. This work explains the main features of mRNA vaccines including how they work and how they are made as well as their medical applications and ways to take them. This review explains how making vaccines with nanomaterials and mRNA demonstrates new ways to develop vaccines as well as detect and cure different diseases.

Literature Review

The use of genetic vaccines produces better immune responses than traditional protein and weakened or full virus vaccination methods (*Sheridan C. MRN,2022)*. DNA vaccines can build both immune defenses in blood and the immune reaction of body's cells according to research (*Sheridan C. MRNA,2022)*. On a large production scale genetic vaccine produce better tolerance than typical

vaccine methods according to research (*Chen J., Ye Z., Huang C., Qiu M., Song D,2022)*. The three versions of mRNA vaccines include regular mRNA and two types of manufactured self-replicating mRNA elements. The term "conventional mRNA" means non-amplifying mRNA vaccine products because they have untranslated areas (5'UTR, 3'UTR) and mRNA protein sequence sections (*Chen J., Ye Z., Huang C., Qiu M., Song D,2022)*. Repeat doses of mRNA treatment are needed for the vaccine because high mRNA dosages stimulate the immune system better and RNA does not replicate on its own. To construct self-amplifying mRNA vaccines researchers, add designed replication sections from self-replicating RNA viruses to RNA molecules to enable them to duplicate themselves (*Ruseska I., Fresacher K., Petschacher C., Zimmer,2021)*. Each mRNA vaccine type requires specific sequences in its starting and ending portion as described by the study from 2015. CSEs assist in controlling viral RNA production alongside their protein-targeting capacities according to research by (*Ruseska I., Fresacher K., Petschacher C., Zimmer,2021)*. Self-amplifying mRNA needs minimum nsP 1-4 structure except trans-amplifying mRNA which demands delivery of two RNA genes including nsP 1-4 and a separate RNA without nsP 1-4. That is the fundamental difference between the two mRNA variants.

Mechanism of Action of mRNA Vaccines

During normal cell functioning mRNA emerges as a genetic sequence that the cell nucleus transcribes from its DNA. The cytoplasmic ribosomes will change the mRNA genetic blueprint into its necessary protein product (*Jarzebska N.T., Mellett M., Frei J,2021)*. RNA polymerase first aids in the transcription of mRNA from genomic DNA into primary mRNA. You find both exons and introns in the product mRNA. Primary mRNA evolves into mature mRNA after taking multiple more processing steps. The mRNA processing techniques now consist of adding a 5′ cap structure, adding poly-A at the end and removing the non-coding introns from primary mRNA (*Jarzebska N.T., Mellett M., Frei J,2021)*.

Our mRNA vaccine technique makes vaccine materials by generating mRNA in a laboratory setting then administering it into bodies where the cells allow mRNA to enter and make protein within their cytoplasm. After delivery from the nucleus or cell membrane ribosomes translate movement and naturally produced mRNA into the protein target. The poly-A tail finds PABP bonding sites when translation occurs while eIF attaches to the 5'UTR cap to initiate translation. A ribosome turns every three-nucleotide codon in mRNA into an amino acid during the protein production process. According to mRNA translation processes the ribosome needs to recognize all mRNA vaccine components starting with 5' cap and poly tail through 5' UTR, translation region and 3' UTR.

Using mRNA vaccines as an alternative to plasmid DNA vaccines offers better results because mRNA translation benefits from fewer requirements during the protein production process in cell nuclei. The movement of newly produced RNA faces strong biological hurdles during transportation. The process of delivering RNA into cells faces extreme difficulty from the moment it enters the cell and reaches the endosome (*Farshi E. Peptide-Based MRNA Vaccines,2023)*. Because mRNA needs a carrier to work the delivery platform will be further explained in Section 3. Forcej mRNA, an antigen-encoding genetic sequence produces targeting antigens that trigger immune activation to detect the actual virus infection in the vaccinated patient. The image in Figure 1 explains how the body activates its immune defenses upon administrating mRNA delivery.

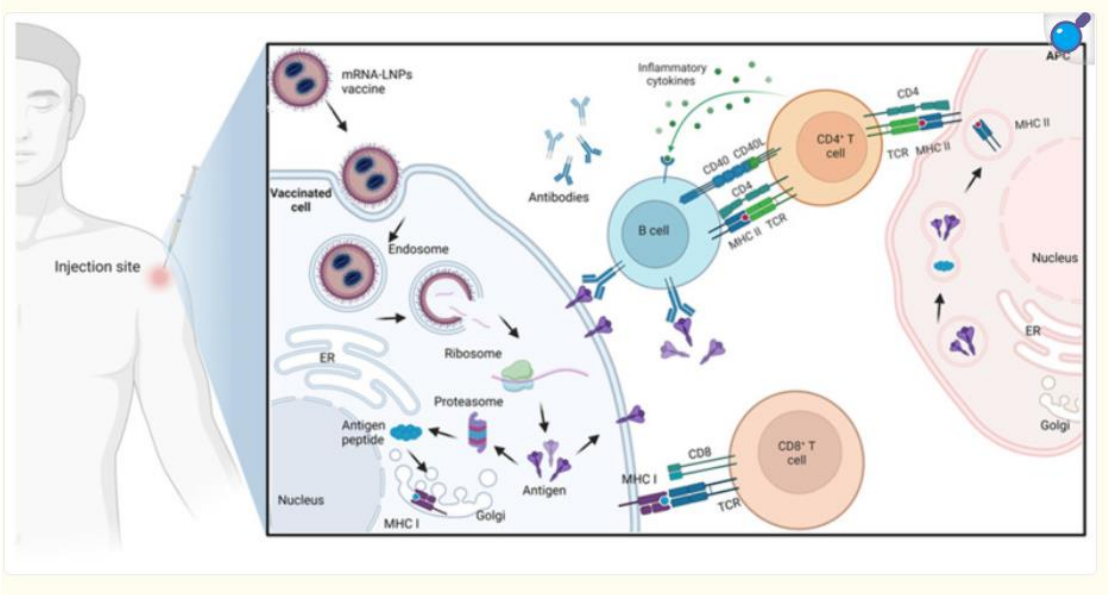

Fig 1. Mechanism of immune activation by mRNA-LNPs vaccines

Optimizing mRNA Vaccines: A Pathway to More Effective Immunization

Modern immunology and public health benefit from mRNA vaccines which have gained special importance against COVID-19. These vaccines give the body genetic material strands encoding viral proteins that make the immune system respond. Modern mRNA vaccines depend less on weakened or inactive virus particles but use instead genetic material to start the immune reaction response. Developing mRNA vaccine solutions against infectious diseases and human diseases like cancer and autoimmune conditions is now possible through our proven success with COVID-19. Current efforts to improve mRNA vaccine performance remain blocked by various production and production challenges.

The mRNA component needs the most improvement to function better. Inside the cell the manufactured mRNA vaccine needs to survive exposure and produce high-quality protein products well. The translation quality and stability of mRNA depend on the arrangement of its nucleic acid base pairs. The specific modification of mRNA nucleotides helps vaccines work better by letting translation happen more strongly while making the vaccine harder to detect and more durable. Scientists use Pseudo uridine as a modified nucleotide in mRNA vaccines to reduce immune system reactions toward mRNA while improving protein production and vaccines work better.

To effectively transfer vaccines to the cells the lipid nanoparticles surrounding mRNA need further optimization. LNPs protect mRNA delivery into cells by keeping it secure from damage during transport. Lipid nanoparticles can enhance how cells take up mRNA and distribute it better through the body to work more effectively. Nanoparticles tailored to recognize specific cell types will make vaccines work better and more precisely.

The protein section encoded by mRNA needs to be enhanced for better vaccination results. The way protein is presented needs to trigger strong immune response and activate protective immunity. The goal is to create modifications that enable immune cells to detect the virus better whether through manipulations to the protein structure or by replicating its natural form. To maximize protection against COVID-19 infection the spike protein in mRNA vaccines was designed to hold its structure and foster the creation of neutralizing antibodies which stop the virus from infecting cells.

The methods to transport mRNA vaccines need optimization to achieve better results. The survival of mRNA vaccines becomes hard because they quickly break down under warm conditions. The transport of mRNA vaccines faces obstacles because they need specific cold storage systems to maintain their effectiveness especially in places with minimal resources. Scientists create new vaccines and delivery systems to stabilize mRNA vaccines for use at room temperatures. This new method will make mRNA vaccines available to more people worldwide.

Current research focuses on creating precise treatment plans and combining vaccines to enhance mRNA vaccines. Doctors now develop custom mRNA vaccines through patient-specific tumor markers to give effective personalized medicine to fight cancer. By combining mRNA vaccines with checkpoint inhibitor medicines doctors may create more effective treatments that help people with cancers that resist standard medical care.

The mRNA Vaccine Applications

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METHODOLOGY

The mRNA Vaccines against Cancers

Use of tumor antigens in the mRNA cancer vaccine ensures effective activation of cellular immunity during treatment. The body produces TAAs which appear on healthy and cancerous cells while TSAs exist in tumor cells alone. BioNTech develops the FixVac BNT111 mRNA cancer vaccine by targeting four targeted melanoma antigens: tyrosinase and MAGE A3, NY-ESO-1, and transmembrane phosphatase with tensin homology. Before human trials researchers confirmed that BNT111 created a reinforced immune system response against tumors since CD8+ T cells remained essential in this immune response. After receiving the eighth

dose 75% of patients produced immune response against any of the four TAAs. BioNTech produces two customized products called BNT112 and BNT113 through mRNA vaccines. These vaccines encode genes for specific mutations in patients' prostate tumors which target PSA, PAP, and three more tumor antigens and for HPV16-associated tumor antigens E6 and E7. The BNT122 vaccine trials are active for evaluating its safe use, ease of tolerance, and treatment effectiveness across multiple cancer types. This vaccine contains pre-made non-mutated tumor-associated antigens together with specific tumor mutations found in each patient.

The development and testing of mRNA vaccines for safety and antigen activation happen through established research steps in clinical studies. To show how vaccine works with patients Clinical Trial progress occurs in Three parts: Phase I, Phase II and Phase III serving unique tests of Vaccine effectiveness and safety.

The development candidate must complete thorough animal studies to proceed with human trials. Studies test if the vaccine stops targeted diseases effectively while showing no harmful effects and creating immune protection. After developers modify mRNA vaccines to work against SARS-CoV-2 they test these vaccines in laboratory animals such as mice and non-human primates to measure their immune response.

In phase 1 trials healthy volunteers' number between 20 and 100 go through initial testing of vaccine safety and dosing. The research team evaluates the right amount of vaccine needed and studies if it is both safe and acceptable. Our evaluations at this phase determine both the vaccination-generated T cells and the antibodies produced by your immune system. In Phase 1 trials medical teams give various vaccine amounts to their study subjects to determine which vaccine strength delivers the best results before further research.

Key outcomes in Phase I include:

1. **Safety**: Monitoring for adverse reactions, such as fever, pain at the injection site, or systemic effects.
2. **Immune Response**: Assessing the production of antibodies (neutralizing antibodies) and T-cell responses against the viral target.
3. **Optimal Dose**: Identifying the most effective and well-tolerated dose for further studies.

Phase 2 trials of safety and immunological effects extend Phase 1 research by testing the vaccine in hundreds of new participants. Researchers test vaccine safety more extensively here before checking how well vaccinated people develop immunity to the recommended dose. Research teams test the vaccine's performance among different patient groups including senior citizens and people with medical problems.

Key outcomes in Phase II include:

1. **Immune Response**: Measuring levels of antibodies and T-cells post-vaccination, comparing the response to natural infection or standard vaccine formulations.
2. **Safety Profile**: Identifying any unexpected side effects and their severity.
3. **Vaccine Schedule**: Determining the ideal timing between doses (if applicable) for maximum immune efficacy.

Phase III research needs thousands of volunteers to show if a vaccine can protect people from getting ill and works safely in different groups. This research model randomly assigns people to receive mRNA vaccines instead of active medicines or placebos. The main goal of these studies is to confirm that the vaccine reduces illness across all people nationwide.

Key outcomes in Phase III include:

1. It evaluates how well vaccines protect people from illness within actual environment. Health authorities examine if COVID-19 vaccines lower overall symptoms, vulnerable disease states, hospital use, and death rates.
2. **Safety**: Constant observation for side effects such allergic reactions, thrombosis, or myocarditis.
3. Vaccines need testing against distinct areas of the population for differences between age groups, race types, and medical background. In some cases, the Phase III trials for mRNA vaccines are initiated during ongoing Phase II trials if early safety and efficacy data are promising.

4. **Regulatory Approval**: Upon successful completion of Phase III trials, mRNA vaccine candidates are submitted to regulatory bodies such as the U.S. FDA or the European Medicines Agency (EMA) for review and approval. This includes a comprehensive analysis of clinical trial data, including efficacy, safety, and manufacturing standards.

RESULTS

COVID-19 mRNA Vaccine Trials:

Clinical studies of COVID-19 mRNA vaccines developed by Moderna (mRNA-1273) and Pfizer-BioNTech (BNT162b2) demonstrate strong protective values along with safe outcomes.

1. Both vaccines showed more than 90% success to stop symptomatic COVID-19 infection during final clinical trials. The vaccines from Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna showed different results through their respective efficacy findings as Pfizer-BioNTech reached 95% while Moderna achieved 94.1%. The two vaccines effectively protected patients from becoming seriously ill enough to need hospitalization.

2. Both vaccines worked well for safety with normal side effects that mostly appeared as reaction at the injection site and mild body pain. Although rare the vaccinations caused severe allergic reactions which needs close monitoring after receipt of the vaccine.

3. The vaccines build permanent protection against COVID-19 symptoms yet become less effective after some time which requires update shots.

Studies have consistently proven that mRNA vaccines generate effective results throughout different types of people. The features of each age group's immune response and medical history impact vaccine protection only slightly. Nonetheless both vaccines support effective defense in all age groups with different health conditions therefore people need a booster to reach optimal protection.

The vaccine protection decreases through time so additional shots build up its effectiveness. Booster shots significantly increase vaccine protection by raising antibody levels and protecting against both mutated versions of SARS-CoV-2. The key data from clinical studies on the Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna vaccines appear in Table 1 and Figure 2.

Vaccine	Efficacy (%)	Common Side Effects (%)	Serious Side Effects (%)
Pfizer-BioNTech	95	70	0.002
Moderna	94.1	68	0.003

Table 1. key findings from the clinical trials

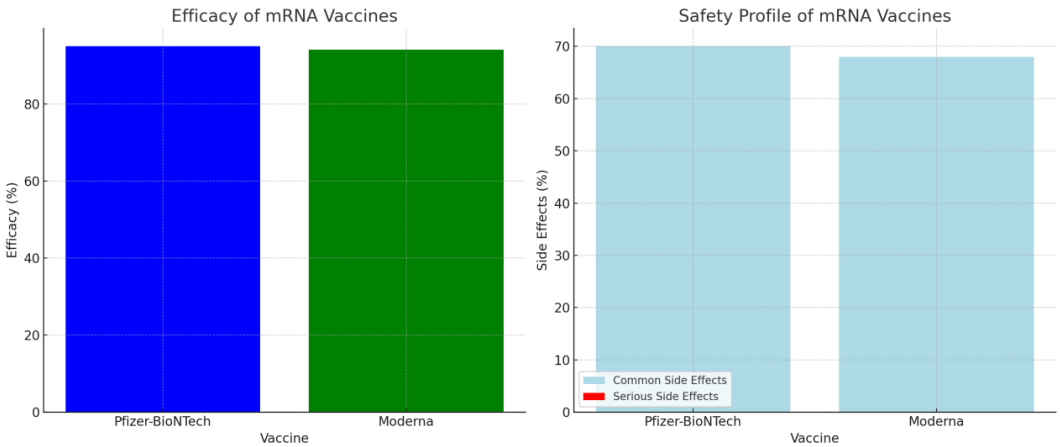

Figure 2. Results

CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic made the world see the revolution mRNA vaccines could create while also showing why these vaccines are better than traditional platforms. Although Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna showed that their mRNA vaccines work well in trials they need modifications for better performance. Lipid nanoparticles became a critical method to solve delivery and stabilization challenges that come with mRNA vaccines. Next to fighting infectious diseases mRNA vaccines show promising benefits in treating cancer and improving custom treatment methods. The next stage of research must advance the performance of these vaccines for wider application. The creation of mRNA vaccines forms our best defense against emerging diseases as the world prepares for more outbreaks across nations.

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