

Commentary [Legal Action by Jenna Greene](#)

Health COVID-19 Public Policy

4 minute read · January 7, 2022 12:51 PM EST · Last Updated a year ago

# 'Paramount importance': Judge orders FDA to hasten release of Pfizer vaccine docs

By Jenna Greene





A vial and syringe are seen in front of a displayed Pfizer and Biontech logo. REUTERS/Dado Ruvic/Illustration

<  Companies  Law firms  Related documents >



Pfizer Inc

Follow

Jan 7 - Score one for transparency.

A federal judge in Texas on Thursday ordered the Food and Drug Administration to make public the data it relied on to license Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine, imposing a dramatically accelerated schedule that should result in the release of all information within about eight months.

That’s roughly 75 years and four months faster than the FDA said it could take to complete a Freedom of Information Act request by a group of doctors and scientists seeking an estimated 450,000 pages of material about the vaccine.

Advertisement · Scroll to continue

The court “concludes that this FOIA request is of paramount public importance,” wrote U.S. District Judge Mark Pittman in Fort Worth, who was appointed to the bench by former President Donald Trump in 2019.

While Pittman recognized “the ‘unduly burdensome’ challenges that this FOIA request may present to the FDA,” in his [four-page order](#), he resoundingly rejected the agency’s suggested schedule.

## Latest Updates

---

Government

**Court allows New York to enforce limits on guns on private property**

---

Judiciary

**First Black woman on Delaware high court confirmed to federal bench**

---

[View 2 more stories](#) ▾

Rather than producing 500 pages a month — the FDA's proposed timeline — he ordered the agency to turn over 55,000 a month. That means all the Pfizer vaccine data should be public by the end of the summer rather than, say, the year 2097.

Even if the FDA may not see it this way, I think Pittman did the agency — and the country — a big favor by expediting the document production.

I’ve been [chronicling this fight](#) since November and have heard from of readers who said they felt something was suspicious, even nefarious, in the FDA’s proposed slo-mo timeline. Making the information public as soon as possible may help assuage the concerns of vaccine skeptics and convince them the product is safe.

---

Advertisement · Scroll to continue

government.”

Still, the FDA is likely to be hard-pressed to process 55,000 pages a month.

The office that reviews FOIA requests has just 10 employees, according to a declaration filed with the court by Suzann Burk, who heads the FDA’s Division of Disclosure and Oversight Management. Burk said it takes eight minutes a page for a worker “to perform a careful line-by-line, word-by-word review of all responsive records before producing them in response to a FOIA request.”

At that rate, the 10 employees would have to work non-stop 24 hours a day, seven days a week to produce the 55,000 pages a month (and would still fall a bit short).

But as lawyers for the plaintiffs Public Health and Medical Professionals for Transparency pointed out in [court papers](#), the FDA as of 2020 had 18,062 employees. Surely some can be dispatched to pitch in at the FOIA office.

Aaron Siri of Siri & Glimstad, who represents the plaintiffs, in an email said the decision "came down on the side of transparency and accountability."

His clients — a group that includes more than 200 doctors, scientists, professors and public health professionals, including some who have publicly questioned the efficacy of lockdown policies, mask mandates and the vaccine itself — have pledged to publish all the information they receive from the FDA on their website.

The Justice Department, which represented the FDA in the litigation, did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Thursday evening. Pfizer, not a party to the suit, also did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Pittman in his order made clear that the FOIA request, even if burdensome, has to be a priority for the FDA.

Quoting from remarks made during the hearing before him on December 14, he wrote that “there may not be a ‘more important issue at the Food and Drug Administration . . . than the pandemic, the Pfizer vaccine, getting every American vaccinated,” and assuring the public that the vaccine was not “rush[ed] on behalf of the United States.”

## Wait what? FDA wants 55 years to process FOIA request over vaccine data



Our Standards: [The Thomson Reuters Trust Principles.](#)

---

Opinions expressed are those of the author. They do not reflect the views of Reuters News, which, under the Trust Principles, is committed to integrity, independence, and freedom from bias.

### **Jenna Greene**

Thomson Reuters

Jenna Greene writes about legal business and culture, taking a broad look at trends in the profession, faces behind the cases, and quirky courtroom dramas. A longtime chronicler of the legal industry and high-profile litigation, she lives in Northern California. Reach Greene at [jenna.greene@thomsonreuters.com](mailto:jenna.greene@thomsonreuters.com)



## **Read Next / Editor's Picks**

---

Breakingviews

### **FTX sins don't absolve its big-money enablers**

34 min ago

---

Health

### **Full 7th Circuit urged to strike down Indiana fetal burial law**

44 min ago

---

Future of Money

### **FTX founder Bankman-Fried, charged with fraud, may fight extradition to U.S.**

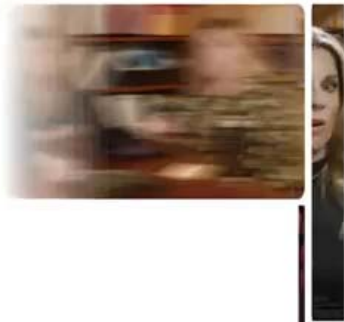
44 min ago

---

Business

### More from Reuters

AD



# Cheers to Mohegan Sun

Ad Choices

**A drag queen story hour goes ahead despite threats**  
01:52



**Lockerbie bombing suspect taken into U.S. custody**  
01:19



**U.S. soccer journalist Wahl dies at World Cup**  
01:33



**A cautious response as China eases 'zero-COVID'**  
01:52



**Is the Griner-Bout prisoner swap a Putin victory?**  
01:48



**Images of November**  
02:17



**Images of November**  
02:17



### Sponsored Content

Dianomi

**New York: The List Of The Top Financial Advisor Firms Is Out**



Sponsored by smartasset

**Help Save On Taxes: Know Your Cost Basis**



Sponsored by Charles Schwab

**Reputation matters. Yours and ours. Apply today.**



Sponsored by Fidelity Investments

**Amid Uncertainty, Value**



**Understand the latest trends**



### Industry Insight

Industry Insight

Zach Warren  
December 7, 2022

Industry Insight

**Insights in Action: How are US firms stealing market share in the UK?**

Tom Burgess  
November 30, 2022

Industry Insight

**Fraud, transaction problems highlight US consumer complaints over crypto**

Richard Satran  
November 30, 2022

Industry Insight

**Custom & Advisory: Implications of ESG for law firms bring up compliance issues & new business opportunities**

Brent Turner  
November 23, 2022

Sponsored Content



**“The Great Unraveling” has just begun... here’s what you need to know**



Sponsored by Stansberry Research

**Make the Season More Jolly With a High APY Savings Account**



Sponsored by NerdWallet

**When Opportunity Strikes, Take Action**



Sponsored by CME Group

**Free Guide Shows Traders How To Trade Options On A Shoestring budget**



Sponsored by Tradewins

**Help Save On Taxes: Know Your Cost Basis**



Sponsored by Charles Schwab

**Live for the work week. Find your Fidelity today.**



Sponsored by Fidelity Investments

[Home](#)

[Media](#)

 [Videos](#)

 [Pictures](#)

 [Graphics](#)

[World](#)

[Business](#)

[Legal](#)

[Markets](#)

[Breakingviews](#)

[Technology](#)

[Investigations](#)

[Lifestyle](#)

[About Reuters](#)

[About Reuters](#)

[Careers](#)

[Reuters News Agency](#)

[Brand Attribution Guidelines](#)

[Reuters Leadership](#)

[Reuters Fact Check](#)

[Reuters Diversity Report](#)

[Stay Informed](#)

[Download the App](#)

[Newsletters](#)

### Information you can trust

Reuters, the news and media division of Thomson Reuters, is the world's largest multimedia news provider, reaching billions of people worldwide every day. Reuters provides business, financial, national and international news to professionals via desktop terminals, the world's media organizations, industry events and directly to consumers.

### Follow Us



### Thomson Reuters Products

#### Westlaw

Build the strongest argument relying on authoritative content, attorney-editor expertise, and industry defining technology.

#### Onesource

The most comprehensive solution to manage all your complex and ever-expanding tax and compliance needs.

#### Checkpoint

The industry leader for online information for tax, accounting and finance professionals.

### Refinitiv Products

#### Refinitiv Workspace

Access unmatched financial data, news

#### Refinitiv Data Catalogue

Browse an unrivalled portfolio of real-time

#### Refinitiv World-Check

Screen for heightened risk individual and



MOBILE.

NETWORKS.

---

**Advertise With Us** [↗](#) **Advertising Guidelines** [↗](#)

All quotes delayed a minimum of 15 minutes. See here for a complete list of exchanges and delays.

**Cookies** [↗](#) **Terms of Use** [↗](#) **Privacy** [↗](#) **Digital Accessibility** [↗](#) **Corrections** [↗](#) **Site Feedback** [↗](#)

© 2022 Reuters. All rights reserved







