

Ethnic minority communities and the elderly called upon to bolster the fight against coronavirus



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270,000 people across the UK have signed up to participate in vital COVID-19 vaccine studies – but thousands more needed

researchers are specifically calling on more people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds to take part in clinical trials to ensure COVID-19 vaccines work for all

Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups are currently under-represented in trials, along with vulnerable groups such as those with chronic diseases and over 65s

Researchers are today (Tuesday 13 October) calling on more people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds and the over 65s to volunteer for clinical studies through the NHS Vaccine Registry to ensure potential candidates work for all.

Currently, ethnic minorities are under-represented in vaccine clinical trials taking place across the UK. Of the 270,000 people who have already signed up to the NHS Registry, only 11,000 volunteers are from Asian and British Asian backgrounds, and just 1,200 are Black, African, Caribbean or Black British. This is in contrast to 93% people from non-ethnic minority groups that have already signed up.

Large-scale clinical studies with a diverse pool of volunteers will help researchers better understand the effectiveness of each vaccine candidate. With 6 different COVID-19 vaccines currently progressing in the UK, including the University of Oxford/Astrazeneca and US biotech company Novavax candidates, thousands of people from different ages and backgrounds are urgently needed to help speed up their

development and ensure they work effectively for the whole population.

This includes people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities who are disproportionately affected by COVID-19. According to Public Health England, people from Black backgrounds are statistically more likely to be diagnosed with COVID-19, while death rates are higher for Black and Asian ethnic groups.

In addition, other vulnerable groups such as people with chronic diseases or over the age of 65 years are needed to take part in trials and also being urged to volunteer for clinical trials.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

Coronavirus can affect anyone regardless of their background, age or race. To ensure we can find a safe and effective vaccine that works for everyone, we all need to get involved.

That's why we are urging more people to support our incredible scientists and join the 270,000 people who have already signed-up so we can speed up efforts to find a vaccine to defeat this virus once and for all.

Minister for Equalities Kemi Badenoch, who is volunteering for COVID-19 vaccine trials being conducted by US biotechnology company Novavax at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, London, said:

The UK is leading the world in the search for a Covid-19 vaccine. At home, we have to ensure every community trusts a future vaccine to be safe and that it works across the entire population.

But with less than half a percent of people on the NHS Vaccine Registry from a Black background, we have a lot more work to do.

That is why I am urging more people from the ethnic minority backgrounds to join me in signing up to the NHS Vaccine Registry and taking part in a trial. Together we can be part of

the national effort to end this pandemic for good.

The NHS Vaccine Registry was launched in July to create a database of people who can be contacted by the NHS to take part in clinical studies, to speed up the development of a safe and effective vaccine.

The Registry has been developed by the government, in partnership with the NIHR, NHS Digital, the Scottish and Welsh governments and the Northern Ireland Executive.

People who volunteer may be approached by researchers to discuss taking part in research studies in the UK.

Chair of the Government's Vaccine Taskforce, Kate Bingham said:

The only way to check how well a coronavirus vaccine works is to carry out large-scale clinical trials involving thousands of people. Researchers need data from different communities and different people to improve understanding of the vaccines. The only way to get this is through large clinical trials.

We want to ensure the data we get actually represents the different people from different backgrounds in the UK. This includes people who are over 65, frontline healthcare workers, or have existing health conditions, and we need people from the communities which have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic from Black, Asian and other minority ethnic backgrounds.

Dr Maheshi Ramasamy, Consultant in Infectious Diseases and Acute General Medicine and Principal Investigator at the Oxford Vaccine Group said:

We know that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately affected by COVID in terms of severe disease and mortality. So when we do have a vaccine that we roll out to the general population, it's really important that we can demonstrate to people from these communities that we have evidence that the vaccine works.

Dr Anna Goodman, a consultant in infectious diseases at Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, who is leading the Novavax study at the Trust said:

We are privileged to work in such a research active trust serving such a diverse local population. The Novavax vaccine trial is one of several trials of Urgent Public Health importance in COVID-19 that we are currently running.

Finding effective vaccines to prevent coronavirus (COVID-19) is key to our global efforts to control the spread of this disease.

Having participants in our COVID-19 trials who come from a range of backgrounds gives us the best possible chance of ensuring the findings of trials apply to everyone. We are hugely grateful to the Minister and all the other participants who are taking part in all of these research trials at Guy's and St Thomas'.

Black, Asian and minority ethnic participation in vaccine research is explored in detail in the latest podcast in the series COVID-19: the search for a vaccine.

The UK public can support the national effort to speed up vaccine research and receive more information about volunteering for clinical studies by visiting the NHS website.

Notes to editors

Public Health England's report on Disparities in the Risk and Outcomes of Covid-19.

The Office for National Statistics has reported that people of black ethnicity were 1.9 times more likely to die from a COVID-19 related death than those of white ethnicity. Bangladeshi and Pakistani men were 1.8 times more likely to have a COVID-19 related death than white men, and for women the figure was 1.6 times more likely. Read Coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths by ethnic group, England and Wales: 2 March 2020 to 10 April 2020 from the Office of National Statistics for more information.

The podcast COVID-19 – the search for a vaccine is available on Spotify, Apple podcasts, and other platforms.

Volunteering for COVID-19 vaccine clinical trials

People wishing to volunteer to support clinical trials can sign up for information on COVID-19 vaccine trials with the NHS COVID-19 vaccine research registry, developed in partnership with NHS Digital. It is helping large numbers of people to be recruited into trials rapidly over the coming months - potentially meaning an effective vaccine for coronavirus can be found as soon as possible.

The service was commissioned as part of the UK government's Vaccine Taskforce in conjunction with the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh Governments.

Anyone living in the UK can sign up online to take part in the trials through the NHS, giving permission for researchers to contact you if they think you're a good fit. Once you sign up, you can withdraw at any time and request that your details be removed from the COVID-19 vaccine research registry. The process takes about 5 minutes to complete.

More information can be found on the NHS website.

About the Vaccine Taskforce

The Vaccine Taskforce (VTF) was set up under the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) in May 2020, to ensure that the UK population has access to clinically effective and safe vaccines as soon as possible, while working with partners to support international access to successful vaccines. This is to place the UK at the forefront of global vaccine research, development, manufacture and distribution.

The Vaccine Taskforce comprises a dedicated team of private sector industry professionals and officials from across government who are working at speed to build a portfolio of promising vaccine candidates that can end the global pandemic. It is chaired by biotech and life sciences expert Kate Bingham, who was appointed by the Prime Minister Boris

Johnson.

The Vaccine Taskforce's approach to securing access to vaccines is through:

procuring the rights to a diverse range of promising vaccine candidates to spread risk and optimise chances for success

providing funding for clinical studies, diagnostic monitoring and regulatory support to rapidly evaluate vaccines for safety and efficacy

providing funding and support for manufacturing scale-up and fill and finish at risk so that the UK has vaccines produced at scale and ready for administration should any of these prove successful

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