



Covid-19 vaccinations

Why we think you should say YES



Covid-19 vaccinations: Have you decided?

We're being told that vaccines are going to be critical to ending the Covid-19 pandemic – providing enough people are vaccinated.

As a BME-led housing association, we are very worried that so many Black and Asian people are saying they might turn down the offer of a vaccination.

In a recent study, 72% of Black people and 42% of Asians said they might not get vaccinated. Eastern Europeans were also less sure about vaccines than white British people.

We understand why you are cautious. But Covid-19 is a vicious illness, which can kill young people as well as older people. It leaves others with Long Covid symptoms, lasting weeks and months.

We are particularly concerned because our Black and Asian communities have a much higher risk of dying from the disease.

Risk of dying

Compared to white British people, the risk of dying from Covid-19 is:

- **almost double if you are Black (1.9 times as likely)**
- **1.8 times higher if you are a Bangladeshi or Pakistani man (slightly less if you're a woman)**
- **1.3 times higher if you belong to another ethnic minority group.**
- **And, by April 2020, deaths of Jewish people in London were 3.7 times higher than normal.**

There are many reasons for this increased risk – including the jobs our people do, how people are living (some communities have larger households for example), the fact that you are more likely to be less well off and the effects of institutional racism.

Some health conditions (including diabetes and high blood pressure) are more common in our communities too.

We want to look at some of the reasons you might be hesitant and explain why we think all our tenants, whatever your ethnic background, should get the vaccine when it's offered to you.

Why you might be cautious

Some reasons for being cautious are easier to reject than others.

The vaccines contain a microchip so that Bill Gates can track us?

OR Coronavirus is being spread by 5G masts to control us?

Some theories are being spread online to confuse people. Many are coming from the far right. These are not people who care about your safety. These theories are simply not true.

Other reasons for being cautious are more understandable.

Can Black people really trust big Pharma?

Pharmaceutical companies and researchers have treated Black people very badly in the past.

People know about the Tuskegee experiment – where for 40 years, until the early 1970s, 600 Black men in Alabama, USA, were not told they had syphilis and were monitored but not treated, in a medical experiment.

From the 1990s, they may also know about the disastrous testing of a drug for meningitis in Nigeria. And about the unethical trials of AZT for AIDS carried out in Zimbabwe on pregnant women. Both led to children and babies dying. Early in the Covid-19 pandemic, when



three French doctors suggested testing vaccines in Africa, there was understandable anger. They later apologised. But it is not true that the vaccines have been trialled in New Guinea or Senegal, killing children (two myths that are circulating).

Several things really are different this time. Firstly, worldwide outrage has forced pharmaceutical companies to behave better in recent years. More importantly, the whole world has watched the current vaccines being developed.

The biggest racial injustice is likely to come when people in the global south have to wait much longer for life-saving vaccines than people in rich countries.

It's all been done so quickly – can we trust this?

Getting to a vaccine in 10 months is an extraordinary achievement, when it usually takes years. However, there are good reasons why this was possible. Firstly, recent work on Ebola and Zika vaccines gave scientists a head start. Secondly, there was plenty of funding.

The scientists found safe ways to speed up the usual trials – helped by lots of willing vaccine volunteers. The scale of the pandemic also meant they could quickly see if the vaccines were working. Tens of thousands of people in the UK, Brazil,



South Africa, Turkey, the USA and elsewhere took part in trials.

Since being approved for use by medical regulators in several countries, millions of people have been safely vaccinated.

But are the vaccines safe for people like us?

Fewer Black and Asian people took part in the trials than white people, because they were hesitant. People in our communities don't feel they can always trust that they get the same standard of care as white people.

However, Black and Asian doctors and nurses did take part and have been among the first to get vaccinated so far. Many BME health and care workers have died from Covid-19.

The vaccines were not tested on pregnant women for ethical reasons. So, pregnant women will not be offered the vaccine routinely for now. However, pregnant women who are at high risk of catching and dying from

Covid-19 may be offered the vaccine, because the risks are thought to be low.

Could the vaccines affect your DNA or fertility?

The Pfizer BioNTech and Moderna vaccines are a new type of vaccine based on mRNA. The mRNA element never enters the nucleus of your cells, where the DNA is stored. For the short time it is in your body, the mRNA teaches your immune system to recognise and fight proteins in the Covid-19 virus.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, and the Royal College of Midwives, say there is no cause to worry about your future fertility, as the vaccines can't affect your DNA.

Are the vaccines halal?

Muslims understandably need to be sure that the vaccines are halal.

Rumours spread on social media and on WhatsApp groups suggested the vaccines might contain gelatine or other animal products, or tissue from aborted fetuses.

None of these things are true. Imams at 100 mosques across the country confirmed this in Friday prayers on 22 January 2021. They encouraged worshippers to accept vaccines. Some have put details online of their own vaccinations.



Are the vaccines kosher?

Jewish people have been concerned by rumours that the vaccines might contain pork or cause infertility. Neither is true.

An open letter signed by 70 British Jewish doctors in December 2020 confirmed that the vaccines are kosher and that there is no logical reason to fear infertility from mRNA vaccines.



Could a vaccine give you Covid?

Traditional vaccines like the Oxford AstraZeneca use modified viruses to trigger an immune response. The Oxford vaccine uses elements of an inactivated virus that gives chimpanzees the common cold. You cannot get Covid from this vaccine.

Are there are better ways to protect yourself against Covid-19?

Early in the pandemic, some myths on social media suggested that drinking alcohol and eating high alkaline foods would protect you from Covid-19. This isn't true.

Some health and wellbeing online influencers suggest that vaccines stop your body from protecting you naturally. This is not true either.

It is true that eating well and taking care of yourself are good for your general health. Taking Vitamin D – which most people living in the UK (particularly people of colour) lack – is also highly recommended for boosting your immune system.

However, getting the jab is by far the best way available to protect yourself from Covid-19 – even if you have already had the virus.

Getting your vaccine

The vaccine is being rolled out to priority groups first. You should wait until you are contacted to make an appointment – by text message, letter or phone call.

The vaccine is free for all adults – whatever their immigration status. You just need to take your NHS number (letters you get from your GP or hospital will usually include this). This means you may need to sign up with a GP. Everyone living in the UK can do this and GP visits are free.

After your first vaccine, it takes two to three weeks for your immune system to be ready to fight Covid-19. (Low success rates reported from Israel included people who had caught Covid shortly before or straight after their jobs.)



At the end of three weeks, you will have significant protection. Your second vaccination completes the dose and raises your protection further.

HOWEVER: We must all – even after getting vaccinated – keep wearing masks and socially distancing until enough people have had the vaccine and the rates of transmission are low. It may still take many months before life can be more normal.

Places to find out more

The Voice newspaper put readers' questions to a Black vaccine expert, Dr Tolullah Oni: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oE3IGOMXc4&ab_channel

Written/audio advice in 60 languages from Doctors of the World: www.doctorsoftheworld.org.uk/coronavirus-information

Video advice for the Bangladeshi community from Bangla Housing Association: youtu.be/JbYm8JHXJKA

Short videos in Sylheti, Gujarati, Tamil, Punjabi, Urdu explain Covid-19 vaccines: www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55171293

Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis explains it is a 'religious imperative' to take the vaccine: www.facebook.com/watch/?v=3608923625853177