



Kent

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Covid-19: Build on success of vaccination programme in reaching ethnic minority groups, report recommends

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Lessons learnt in relation to increasing uptake of the covid-19 vaccine among ethnic minority groups should now be applied to the booster programme, a government progress report recommends.¹

This includes continuing to use respected local voices to build trust and to help tackle misinformation, the report from the government's Race Disparity Unit says. Such approaches should also be carried over to the winter flu and childhood immunisation programmes and be applied to the work to tackle longer standing health disparities.

In June 2020 the minister for equalities was asked to look at why covid-19 was having a disproportionate impact on ethnic minority groups and to consider how the government response to this could be improved. This latest report is the final one of four.

Taken together the reports identified that the main factors behind the higher risk of covid-19 infection for ethnic minority groups include occupation, living in multigenerational households, and living in densely populated urban areas with poor air quality and high levels of deprivations.

The research was used to inform the rollout of the vaccine programme and increase uptake among ethnic minority groups. The government's community champion scheme, launched in January 2021, contributed to increases in positive vaccine sentiment and vaccine uptake across all ethnic groups, the report says.

Between 31 May and 31 October, the percentage of over 50s who received both doses of the covid-19 vaccine increased in all ethnic groups. The largest increases were in the Pakistani group, up from 54.2% to 78.8%, and the Bangladeshi group, up from 63.7% to 87%.

Interventions to increase uptake included using places of worship as vaccination centres and taking vaccines into the hearts of local communities through initiatives such as vaccination buses and taxis. There were also targeted campaigns to tackle vaccine concerns and promote uptake, linking in with key religious festivals such as Ramadan and Eid.

The report says working with trusted voices such as faith leaders and prominent ethnic minority celebrities and influencers helped build trust and encourage vaccination uptake. For example, vaccine uptake among the Bangladeshi group was increased through a national awareness campaign led by *Great British Bake Off* winner Nadiya Hussain, among others. Local initiatives, including "jab for jalfrezi" a scheme by Bangladeshi owned restaurants offering takeaway tokens, also helped encourage uptake in the community.

The report says ethnic minorities should not be considered a homogenous group. "Covid-19 has affected different ethnic groups in different ways and a 'one size fits all' approach is not an effective way of tackling public health matters." It adds that public health communications should not stigmatise ethnic minorities when explaining that they may be more vulnerable or at higher risk.

Another recommendation is that the National Institute for Health Research and the NHS Race and Health Observatory should move to increase ethnic minority participation in clinical trials in order to build confidence in future vaccination schemes and other health interventions.

All the recommendations contained in the report have been accepted by the government.

Minister for equalities, Kemi Badenoch, said, "Our understanding of how covid-19 affects different ethnic groups has transformed since the pandemic began. We know now that factors like the job someone does, where they live, and how many people they live with impacts how susceptible they are to the virus and it's imperative that those at more risk get their booster vaccine."

1 Final report on progress to address covid-19 health inequalities. December 2021. www.gov.uk/government/organisations/race-disparity-unit.

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