The BMJ

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2020;370:m2914<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m2914>

Published: 20 July 2020

Covid-19: UK agrees “early access” deal with companies to get 90 million vaccine doses

Elisabeth Mahase

The UK government has agreed a deal with pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies to get “early access” to 90 million doses of covid-19 vaccine.

On 20 July the government announced that it had signed deals with BioNTech/Pfizer for 30 million doses of the mRNA vaccine, with Valneva for 60 million doses of inactivated whole virus vaccine, and with AstraZeneca for a million doses of treatments containing covid-19 neutralising antibodies for people who cannot receive vaccines, such as immunocompromised patients and those with cancer.

This is in addition to 100 million doses of the Oxford University vaccine being developed by AstraZeneca: researchers working on a chimpanzee adenovirus vectored vaccine published promising early results from their phase I/II trial (1077 participants) in the *Lancet* on 20 July.¹ They reported that the vaccine induced strong antibody and T cell immune responses up to Day 56 of the ongoing trial, with no serious adverse events from the vaccine.

With these deals, the government has said that the UK could have access to enough doses to vaccinate priority groups, such as frontline health and social care workers or people with an increased health risk.

Complacency

But Kate Bingham, chair of the UK's Vaccine Taskforce, urged caution. She said, “The fact that we have so many promising candidates already shows the unprecedented pace at which we are moving. But I urge against being complacent or overoptimistic. The fact remains we may never get a vaccine and, if we do get one, we have to be prepared that it may not be a vaccine which prevents getting the virus, but rather one that reduces symptoms.”

Alongside the vaccine partnerships, the UK government has launched the NHS covid-19 vaccine research registry, a website to enable members of the public to volunteer for future vaccine studies. It hopes to sign up 500 000 people by October.

The government is also working with ZOE, the health science company behind the COVID symptom study—which allows the public to submit symptoms through an app—to collaborate on vaccine studies and help promote the NHS registry to users.

Chris Whitty, chief medical officer and head of the National Institute for Health Research, said, “Now that there are several promising vaccines on the horizon, we need to call again on the generosity of the public to help find out which potential vaccines are the most effective.”

¹ Folegatti PM, Ewer KJ, Aley PK, et al, on behalf of the Oxford COVID Vaccine Trial Group. Safety and immunogenicity of the ChAdOx1 nCoV-19 vaccine against SARS-CoV-2: a preliminary report of a phase 1/2, single-blind, randomised controlled trial. *Lancet* 2020. [https://www.thelancet.com/lancet/article/S0140-6736\(20\)31604-4](https://www.thelancet.com/lancet/article/S0140-6736(20)31604-4).

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