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Covid-19: Trial participants are offered approved vaccines so they can travel abroad

Elisabeth Mahase

People who took part in covid-19 vaccine trials in the UK will be offered two doses of an approved vaccine from next week to allow them to travel internationally, the government has said.

Approximately 21 000 people have been given a vaccine not yet approved by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. While the UK has provided trial participants with domestic vaccine status they are not recognised as vaccinated by other countries, meaning they face travel restrictions.

Doses of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine will initially be offered to those taking part in the Novavax trial (around 15 000 people), with an eight week interval between doses. The offer will then be extended to participants in other relevant trials—such as the Valneva trial (3000 relevant participants)—within the “coming weeks.”

The government has said the decision follows a consultation with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and the clinical trial chief investigators—although no further information has been provided on what this involved.

People who received both doses of a vaccine as part of a clinical trial will also be offered a booster jab, if eligible, in line with the wider booster advice.¹ Booster jabs will be offered no earlier than six months after the person’s second dose.

Trial participants will be sent letters shortly outlining the next steps. In the meantime participants have been asked to direct questions to their trial sites rather than the NHS. The additional vaccinations will most likely take place at hospital hubs. It’s unclear how the decision will impact trial data.

Deputy chief medical officer Jonathan Van-Tam said, “The measures we have taken will allow UK covid-19 vaccine trial participants to travel freely overseas once they have had the additional vaccinations. Those volunteers now have the flexibility to make a decision for themselves so they can, for example, visit loved ones abroad.

“We should be clear that the results from these trials benefit the whole world, and it has to be said that if more countries around the world had reciprocated by allowing UK volunteers fully vaccinated status for overseas travel, these measures would not have been necessary.”

The government has said it is continuing to work closely with international counterparts to “ensure a longer term solution can be reached for these people, and is in active conversations with other countries through groups such as the G7, the EU Commission, and the World Health Organization.”

EM is a participant in the Valneva covid-19 vaccine trial.

¹ Wise J. Covid-19: Booster doses to be offered to 30 million people in UK. *BMJ* 2021;374:n2261. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n2261 pmid: 34521637

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