

COVID-19 vaccine supply and manufacturing in the UK

I'm grateful to CEPI for bringing us together and to Chatham House for hosting this essential and timely conversation.

It matters because there will be more vaccines produced in the next 10 years than ever in human history.

Our efforts on COVID vaccine supply and manufacturing here in the UK are well progressed:

- over 22 million have received their first dose – two-fifths of our adult population
- we're on course to offer a first dose to the rest of the adult population by the end of July; and
- our second doses are well underway

At the same time-at the global level-we're only just getting started, with much of the world still unvaccinated against COVID-19.

I have a global map of vaccine deployment on the wall of my office. I remember back at the start of December the UK was the only country shaded in blue.

Yes, I felt proud. But equally, I felt anxious – an anxiety that comes from the knowledge that nowhere is truly safe until everywhere is safe.

That's something we're reminded of every time we sequence and discover new variants.

And as we speak, scientists around the world are working to get ahead of some of the new coronavirus variants, looking at how a third vaccine dose could tackle these evolving mutations – much as we do with flu each year.

UK experience

So it's vital we work together to find global solutions, and I think the UK experience can be instructive.

It's worth reminding ourselves that there was nothing inevitable about the position we are in today. It's no accident. It's a result of the hard work of a great number of people and a consequence of a great number of decisions, taken at every point.

In short: we acted early, we acted safely, and we acted quickly.

We acted early, doing things like funding clinical trials and improving access to trials in our National Health Service, partnering University of Oxford's Jenner Institute with AstraZeneca, so they could develop and

manufacture a safe and effective vaccine together, and bringing together a Vaccines Taskforce to coordinate work across academia, industry and government, under the leadership of Kate Bingham.

This holy trinity of academic excellence, private-sector entrepreneurialism, and civil service grip has forged a team of remarkable brilliance, which is a model for how governments can get stuff done quickly in the future.

The taskforce was charged with helping vaccines get through research, setting up supply chains, and – crucially – with buying vaccines on behalf of the whole UK.

We invested early – and at risk.

Crucially, the approach was never ideological. We didn't just buy British – we backed British and bought from the whole world.

We had no hesitation in embracing the private sector – we embraced their entrepreneurial spirit alongside academic and public-sector excellence.

And we were agnostic about technology – backing candidates that used mRNA, adenovirus, protein adjuvant and inactivated whole virus technologies.

Next, we acted safely, because in the MHRA, we have a regulator that stayed tough and rigorous throughout while also showing great flexibility and a disregard for unnecessary bureaucracy.

Nearly half a million people are on our national registry to take part in clinical trials for vaccines and many of them have stepped up for science this past year.

Taken together, it's meant we were the first country in the world to have clinically approved COVID jabs and, crucially, these are vaccines that people can have faith in.

We recognised early that the order in which you vaccinate really matters – both for protecting lives and to ensure that citizens can see it's being done fairly, so we asked independent experts at the JCVI to advise on what order would save most lives.

Third, we acted quickly. The NHS has kept pace with our ambitious schedule, showing – once again – why it enjoys such broad national support and affection from the British people.

That said, even they needed extra support. After all, we've not done anything quite like this in our history. So, the NHS have been ably backed by GPs, pharmacists, the British Armed Forces – and an army of volunteers too.

Acting globally

We know we can't rest on our laurels. As UK Health Secretary I'm not only concerned with making sure we get it right here at home but determined to direct the force of our ingenuity to act globally.

It's not an either/or.

We were an early backer of COVAX, donating over half a billion pounds to support vaccine access for all countries and using our G7 Presidency. I welcome the new commitments made at the G7 leaders meeting last month.

I'm delighted the first vaccine shipments through the COVAX facility have arrived – meaning Ghana and the Ivory Coast could begin their vaccination programmes last week.

I'm so pleased to see our Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine – which is having such a positive impact here at home – play such a vital role in saving lives around the world.

I'm incredibly proud of the decision that the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine should be made available at cost – and I encourage other manufacturers to follow suit.

The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is a gift to the world – and we want to see it used wherever it can save lives.

We in the UK have licensed 100 million doses to protect our population, but billions of doses of the Oxford vaccine will be the mainstay of global access.

This has to be just the beginning – and I'm so pleased we're talking about global solutions today about how we can broaden access. How we can remove tariffs where they apply. How we can better share data on efficacy and trials. How we oppose vaccine protectionism in all its forms.

Vaccine supply chains are global – and the idea of one part of the world blocking exports is a mistake.

The pandemic has put us all on the same side in the battle for global health.

And when we work together, we'll all be the winners.