

Government and faith leaders join forces to support booster drive

The government and faith leaders have united in the national effort to get the country boosted in the wake of a surge in Omicron cases.

The drive is being supported by religious leaders, including members of the Prime Minister's Places of Worship Taskforce, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Sheikh Nuru Mohammed, and the General Secretary of the Hindu Council.

Faith Minister Kemi Badenoch was today (17 December 2021) meeting with religious leaders to thank them for their work so far and call on their urgent support in increasing booster uptake.

Faith leaders – who are the pillars of many communities across the country – have played a vital role throughout the pandemic, from backing the vaccine drive, to making sure people practice their faith safely, and even adapting places of worship into pop-up soup kitchens and food banks.

As numbers of the new variant continue to rise at an alarming rate, the government today joined forces with faith leaders to help spread the message that booster vaccines are critical in our fight against the virus.

At a summit alongside senior NHS figures, Kemi Badenoch today outlined the government's response to the latest variant and highlighted areas where faith leaders' support will be most welcome.

Vaccines have saved countless lives and continue to be our best way to protect against COVID-19 – and have helped over the last few months to bring communities back together. The UK has one of the highest uptake rates in the world, with more than 85% of adults double jabbed so far, allowing people to come together in places of worship, to practice their faith safely.

However, data shows that people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds are currently less likely to take up the vaccine, and we need everyone from every background to do their bit.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Faith and local community leaders have played a vital role supporting the COVID-19 vaccine programme from the very beginning. Thank you to everyone who is uniting behind this national mission, spreading the word about the life-saving benefits of the vaccines and encouraging people to roll up their sleeves and get boosted now.

We're working with the NHS to provide advice and information at every opportunity on how to get a vaccine and the protection it provides. Today's discussion with faith leaders is another

opportunity to listen to views from across the country and join forces to get ahead in the race against the Omicron variant.

It is never too late to get your vaccine, whether it's your first, second or third. Please come forward and get protected for yourself, your family and your community.

Faith Minister Kemi Badenoch said:

More than 25 million people have already received their booster jab, helping to keep themselves, their friends and family safe this winter but we need everyone from every community to come forward to get ahead of this virus.

This is why I have joined up with leaders from across all the major faiths to ask people of every denomination to come forward and support this huge national effort.

Vaccines are our best defence against Omicron – I therefore urge faith communities, and everyone, to book yourself in today and join the national fight against this virus.

All eligible adults aged over 18 can get their lifesaving booster jab from a walk-in vaccination centre or book online through the National Booking Service following updates to the programme this week.

A total of 750 troops have been drafted in to support deployment of booster vaccines across the UK, while tens of thousands of volunteers have stepped up to support the national mission. Extra vaccine centres and pop-up sites have also opened to make it as easy as possible for people to get vaccinated.

Vaccines are the best way to protect people against COVID-19 and data from the UK Health Security Agency shows a booster vaccine tops up protection against symptomatic infection from the Omicron variant to around 70%.

The government is doing everything possible to spread this message, including through regular meetings with local authorities, faith leaders and organisations that represent ethnic minority communities to provide advice and information about COVID-19 vaccines.

Working together with the NHS and UKHSA, the Department of Health and Social Care is providing advice and information at every possible opportunity to support those getting the vaccine and to anyone who might have questions about the vaccination process.

If you have yet to get your first or second dose, it is never too late – vaccines reduce your risk of hospitalisation and death.

Whatever your faith or your background, join the national effort and get the protection you need now.