

# Government launches Vaccine Taskforce to combat coronavirus

- A new Vaccine Taskforce will drive forward, expedite and co-ordinate efforts to research and then produce a coronavirus vaccine and make sure one is made available to the public as quickly as possible
- 21 new research projects combating coronavirus will receive government funding from a £14 million pot investment to rapidly progress treatments and vaccines
- this follows the government's £250 million pledge to develop a vaccine, putting the UK at the forefront of international efforts to fight the virus

Rapid development and production of a coronavirus vaccine will be driven by a new government-led Vaccine Taskforce, Business Secretary Alok Sharma announced today (Friday 17 April).

The taskforce, led by [Chief Scientific Adviser Sir Patrick Vallance](#) and Deputy Chief Medical Officer Professor Jonathan van Tam, will support efforts to rapidly develop a coronavirus vaccine as soon as possible by providing industry and research institutions with the resources and support needed. This includes reviewing regulations and scaling up manufacturing, so that when a vaccine becomes available, it can be produced quickly and in mass quantities.

Representatives from government, academia and industry are coming together to form the taskforce. Members will include government Life Sciences Champion Sir John Bell, as well as [AstraZeneca](#), and the [Wellcome Trust](#).

The taskforce will focus on 5 strands of activity including:

- supporting the discovery of potential coronavirus vaccines by working with the public and private sector, rapidly mobilising funding, supporting leading academics and identifying ways to fast-track clinical trials
- preparing the UK as a leader in clinical vaccine testing and manufacturing, working with companies already at the forefront of vaccine development
- reviewing government regulations to facilitate rapid and safe vaccine trials
- developing funding and operational plans for the procurement and delivery of vaccines
- building on the UK's research and development expertise to support international efforts to find a coronavirus vaccine

The taskforce is also working closely with the Bioindustry Association, which has set up an industry-led group, to accelerate vaccine development and manufacturing.

Business Secretary Alok Sharma said:

UK scientists are working as fast as they can to find a vaccine that fights coronavirus, saving and protecting people's lives. We stand firmly behind them in their efforts.

The Vaccine Taskforce is key to coordinating efforts to rapidly accelerate the development and manufacture of a potential new vaccine, so we can make sure it is widely available to patients as soon as possible.

Today's announcement is part of the UK's wider efforts to support and accelerate the development of a vaccine for coronavirus. This includes the UK already pledging £250 million from the government aid budget, the biggest donation by any country, to the international programme to develop a coronavirus vaccine under the [Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations](#) (CEPI).

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

We're doing everything possible to save lives and beat this disease, and that includes working flat out with businesses, researchers and industry to find a vaccine as quickly as possible.

The UK is world-leading in developing vaccines. We are the biggest contributor to the global effort – and preparing to ensure we can manufacture vaccines here at home as soon as practically possible.

Chief Scientific Adviser Patrick Vallance said:

The UK is home to world leading scientists, researchers and companies who are all at the forefront of vaccine development and manufacturing.

The taskforce will ensure that any potential coronavirus vaccine, when available, can be produced quickly and at scale so it can be made available to the public as quickly as possible.

The government also announced today 21 new coronavirus research projects set to benefit from a share of around £14 million in government funding.

One new project led by the University of Oxford will trial an anti-malarial drug believed to have anti-inflammatory properties to determine whether it could diminish the effects of COVID-19 on people in high risk groups. GP surgeries across the UK have been invited to take part in this ground-breaking trial, to ascertain whether it could reduce the need for affected patients to go to hospital and speed up their recovery.

Other projects receiving vital government funding from this new pot include:

- Imperial College London testing a vaccine against coronavirus that aims for the body to produce more protective antibodies
- Public Health England developing a new antibody that could offer protection against infection and disease progression of coronavirus
- Public Health England studying how COVID-19 can be transmitted from person-to-person by determining how long it can survive in the air and on different materials found in hospitals and households like fabric, plastics, metals and ceramics

This follows an initial £10.5 million allocated to 6 promising coronavirus projects in March, 2 of which are enabling pre-clinical and clinical vaccine trials, as well as supporting researchers to develop manufacturing processes to produce a vaccine at a million-dose scale.

Additionally, funding under the international CEPI programme is helping scientists and researchers, including those in the UK, continue to lead global efforts to develop a workable coronavirus vaccine. Pioneering British researchers at the University of Oxford are among its recipients, alongside the universities of Edinburgh, Liverpool, Southampton and Bristol. UK aid is working with CEPI to ensure any coronavirus vaccine, once developed, is available and affordable to the NHS.

Chief Medical Officer Professor Chris Whitty said:

The UK has some of the best vaccine scientists in the world, but we need to take account of the whole development process. This taskforce will ensure the UK can take an end-to-end view. This includes funding research, like the recent NIHR/UKRI call, and ensuring manufacturing capability to deliver a COVID19 vaccination as quickly as possible.

UK Research and Innovation Chief Executive, Professor Sir Mark Walport said:

The research community's response to the COVID-19 crisis has been outstanding. In a matter of weeks, researchers have formed projects to develop potential vaccines, repurpose existing drugs and explore the potential for new medicines, and to examine how the virus is transmitted and causes wide variation in symptoms. Pre-clinical trials of vaccines and clinical trials of drugs are already underway.

The pace at which this work has been carried out is tribute to the UK's world-class research base and its dedication to the fight against this disease.

The UK has a long-term commitment to vaccines investment and is the largest funder to [Gavi](#), the global vaccine alliance. Gavi will play a key role in

making any new coronavirus vaccine available and affordable to the world's poorest countries, which will help to slow the global spread of the disease and protect the British public from a deadly second wave of the disease. Gavi has helped to immunise over 760 million children worldwide in the last 20 years.

## **Notes to editors**

Altogether 27 research projects have received a share of a £25 million investment. This follows a government research call to accelerate coronavirus studies and support the UK's world-class scientists and researchers to further the development of vaccines and treatments, as well as improve diagnosis and understanding of the disease.

Find out more about the [research projects announced today](#).

This announcement is part of a £25 million research response, which was announced in February. The first round of projects were announced on 23 March and the second round of projects announced today. The funding is being managed by [UK Research & Innovation](#) (UKRI) and the Department of Health and Social Care through the [National Institute for Health Research](#) (NIHR).

Through the Joint Initiative on Research in Epidemic Preparedness (JIREP) in collaboration with Wellcome, the UK government has provided up to £5 million to the initiative, which was announced on 6 March 2020. [Details of these UK aid-backed research projects](#) were announced yesterday.