

Minister for Equalities sets out government action to tackle Covid disparities

- Minister for Equalities sets out government findings on impact of COVID-19 on ethnic minority people
- Two new expert advisors on COVID-19 and ethnicity appointed
- New measures include up to £25m for Community Champions to reach groups most at risk
- Announcement follows considerable investment in research and targeted messaging

Today (Thursday 22nd October) the Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch MP, will provide the first quarterly report to the Prime Minister and Health Secretary on progress to understand and tackle COVID-19 disparities experienced by individuals from an ethnic minority background.

Since Public Health England released their review of disparities in risks and outcomes in June, the government has been focused on taking action to improve the evidence base on the disparities and protecting those at greatest risk across the UK.

This has included £4.3m of spending on six innovative research projects to better understand the links between COVID-19 and ethnicity, and an additional £4m on targeting messaging at ethnic minority communities. Additionally, the government has ensured that updated guidance is available for employers on protecting their workforce. And more than 95% of frontline NHS staff from ethnic minority backgrounds have had a risk assessment and subsequently have agreed any necessary action as a result.

The evidence and data that has been gathered has given the government and researchers a better understanding of the leading risk factors for ethnic minority people in relation to the virus, these include occupational exposure and existing medical conditions. However, in her report the Minister will set out how the government are committed to take this work further to ensure the data can be translated into more action to protect those that are at greatest risk.

In an Oral Statement today the Minister will also set out a number of new measures which the government is taking to protect those at risk, gather more data on the impact of the virus and to ensure that everyone can access the

latest public health messaging.

Amongst the new measures set out are:

- A new 'Community Champions' scheme, worth up to £25m, funded by MHCLG, that will provide funding to enhance existing communication strategies in the most at risk places, and fund work with grassroots advocates from impacted communities. The scheme will also provide funding for voluntary and community groups who specialise in working with communities most at risk from COVID-19.
- A new mandate for ethnicity to be recorded as part of the death certification process.
- An enhancement of the national Shielded Patients List to account for the increase in understanding of the risk factors related to the virus and the drivers of disparities.

Minister for Equalities, Kemi Badenoch, said:

"Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, we have prioritised protecting the most vulnerable in our society.

"Access to the latest public health information and protections should be available to everyone. To ensure that is the case we have invested in a strong package of measures to target messaging, develop the data we have available and make sure everyone is as safe as possible at home or in the workplace.

"Today's report marks an important first step in our journey to understand and tackle the disproportionate impact of Covid. I remain committed to doing everything possible to beat back this virus."

"Councils are working tirelessly to support their communities throughout the pandemic.

"Which is why we are investing up to £25 million for them to support 'Community Champions' in their area and help protect those most at risk by building trust, reducing transmission and ultimately helping to save lives."

Today's update also includes a detailed breakdown of government work in response to the stakeholder engagement carried out by Professor Fenton earlier this year, highlighting action that has been taken to support the NHS and the adult social care and education sectors.

To help progress this work over the coming months, the Minister has appointed two expert advisors on COVID-19 and ethnicity. Dr Raghieb Ali and Professor Keith Neal will work alongside the Cabinet Office's Race Disparity Unit to provide advice and support to the government's work. The Minister will also

continue to engage with the new SAGE ethnicity sub-group.

Professor Sir Rory Collins, Head of Nuffield Department of Population Health and BHF Professor of Medicine and Epidemiology, University of Oxford, and the Chief Executive of the UK Biobank, said:

“By bringing together relevant data from many different sources, this report will strengthen our understanding of the risk factors that are causing adverse outcomes for ethnic minority people when exposed to COVID-19.

“In doing so, I am confident that the report is an excellent step forward as we look to identify ways to reduce those risks effectively.”

Dr Rohini Mathur, Assistant Professor of Epidemiology, London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, said:

“It is vital that we understand the key drivers of the health disparities caused by COVID-19 and set out evidence-based, efficient action to tackle them.

“This report is a strong step on the path to doing this, highlighting important findings, dispelling damaging misinformation and presenting clear steps to address the impact of the virus on ethnic minority communities.”

Professor Sir Mark Caulfield, Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, Queen Mary University of London and Chief Scientist for Genomics England, said:

‘This important report into Health Inequalities and COVID-19 draws together important strands of evidence to highlight the disproportionate impact on ethnic minorities by identifying the key factors that contribute to their increased risk of infection and adverse outcomes. These include household size, deprivation, co-morbidities and particularly occupation which highlights the vital contribution our diverse communities have made as key workers on the frontline during the pandemic.’