

# Sir Lenny Henry urges Black Britons to take COVID-19 vaccine

- Actor Chiwetel Ejiofor, actor Thandie Newton, radio personality Trevor Nelson, musician KSI and author Malorie Blackman, among the signatories on Sir Lenny Henry's open letter
- Short film based on the letter by BAFTA award-winning director Amma Asante stars Adrian Lester, David Harewood, and Bridgerton's Adjoa Andoh, and will be aired across Sky, BT Sport, Viacom, Discovery, A&E and ROK and Channel 5 tonight from 8pm
- Letter comes as 30 million people have had their first dose of the vaccine – over half the UK's adult population

12 Years a Slave actor and Oscar nominee Chiwetel Ejiofor, author Malorie Blackman, actor Thandie Newton, football pundit Garth Crooks, performer George the Poet and musician KSI, radio personality Trevor Nelson and Bridgerton star Adjoa Andoh are among those who have put their names to the letter which encourages Black adults in the UK to make informed decisions about the vaccine and protect themselves and the people they care for by getting vaccinated when their turn comes.

Sir Lenny's letter, supported by the NHS, has also been turned into a powerful short film, directed by BAFTA award winner Amma Asante, which features Lenny alongside Adrian Lester, David Harewood, Naomie Ackie, Rt Rev Rose Hudson Wilkin, Bishop of Dover and Adjoa Andoh. The film will be aired across Sky, BT Sport, Viacom, Discovery, A&E and ROK between 8pm and 9.30pm.

Sir Lenny Henry said:

I felt it was important to do my bit and so I wrote this letter to Black Britain asking people not to get left behind, to not continue to be disproportionately impacted and to trust the facts from our doctors, professors and scientists, not just in the UK but across the world, including the Caribbean and Africa.

I hear and understand the concerns which people of all backgrounds are wrestling with, but which are particularly concerning in Black communities. I want people to be safe, I don't want people to die or end up in hospital because of COVID-19. So I'm saying, when your turn comes, take the jab.

I want to thank everyone who has signed the letter and dear friends who took part in Amma's beautiful film.

More than 30 million people have now received their first COVID-19 vaccine dose, meaning over half of the UK's adult population have been vaccinated and will soon develop strong protection from serious illness, saving lives and significantly reducing pressures on the NHS.

Television veteran Sir Lenny says he understands the concerns of many in the Black community but tells them he does not want their concerns about the jab to leave them disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

An Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey taken from 13 January to 7 February shows that less than half (49%) of Black or Black British adults reported that they were likely to have the vaccine and NHS data shows that only 466,000 Black or Black British adults have had a first dose of the vaccine so far.

Amma Asante, who directed the film, said:

Creating something for the community I come from was important to me, particularly on a health issue that is as life and death as coronavirus.

I wanted to make a film that acknowledges the concerns of Black people while sharpening the lens on why the vaccine is so important, and why we deserve to have our lives and the lives of our loved ones protected.

I hope the film can contribute to making a difference.

Professor Kevin Fenton, London's Regional Director for Public Health England, said:

We know our Black communities have been among the hardest hit during this pandemic, but we also know there are some among us who are less likely to come forward for the life-saving vaccine.

We can all play a role in encouraging our friends and family to take it up when offered, whether that's answering questions or concerns they may have, pointing them towards information and advice from trusted sources, sharing our own experiences of getting the vaccine or declining to pass on myths and misinformation circulating on social media.

Getting back to normal life in the UK will mean every one of us joining the over 30 million people across the UK who have already taken up the vaccine. So I am fully behind Sir Lenny's call to our Black communities. Let's all do our bit, keep our loved ones safe and end this pandemic sooner rather than later.

People who have received a letter inviting them for a jab can log on to the

[national booking service](#) and choose from 1,700 vaccination sites. Anyone unable to book online can call 119 free of charge, anytime between 7am and 11pm 7 days a week.

[Find more information on the COVID-19 vaccine.](#)

Signatories to the letter have come from across the spectrum of British society. From the business world, signatories include Karen Blackett OBE, Ric Lewis, Sonita Alleyne OBE, Eric Collins, and Wilfred Jones. Names from the arts and entertainment include Malorie Blackman, Lemn Sissay, Roy Williams, Reni Eddo-Lodge, George The Poet and KSI and from sport – Garth Crooks and Chris Hughton. Names from science and medicine have also supported the campaign, including Professor Kevin Fenton and Dame Donna Kinnair.

Baroness Valerie Amos, Baroness Doreen Lawrence and Trevor Phillips have also added their names.

The government is working with the NHS, local authorities, charities and faith leaders to provide advice and public health information in over 13 languages to people from all communities and backgrounds to ensure they come forward for the vaccine.

## **Background information**

ONS statistics on vaccine uptake in the over-70s published on 29 March indicate that 58.8% and 68.7% of those who identify as Black African and Black Caribbean have had the first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in this age group respectively.

Among adults aged 16 to 29 years, 17% reported hesitancy towards the coronavirus vaccine, compared with 1% of adults aged 80 years and over, according to the latest ONS data. This was the highest of all age groups. The data also indicates that less than half (49%) of Black or Black British adults reported that they were likely to have the vaccine; higher proportions were reported among White (85%) and mixed ethnicity (80%) groups.

Analysis showed that mortality rates for deaths involving COVID-19 was highest among males of Black ethnic background at 255.7 deaths per 100,000 population and 119.8 for black women. The figures are lowest for White men at 87.0 deaths per 100,000.

Data also shows that people from ethnic minorities are more likely to test positive from COVID-19 compared with White ethnic groups. An ONS report puts this down in part to the jobs and housing among ethnic minority communities but says this does not completely explain the disparity. Black people in Britain were also significantly more likely to die of the disease according to ONS figures than White people.

The latest weekly NHS data on vaccination uptake by ethnicity shows that over 466,000 and 24,000 Black or Black British adults have taken the first and second COVID-19 vaccine doses respectively.

## Sir Lenny Henry's letter in full

Dear mums, dads, grandparents, uncles, aunties, brothers, sisters, nephew, nieces, daughters, sons and cousins,

We love you!

We know we don't say it often enough and sometimes we have our disagreements, like all families do, but wherever you are we love you from the bottom of our hearts and we know you love us.

And we want to see you again. COVID-19 has kept us apart for far too long. We want to hug you, we want to celebrate with you, we want to go out for dinner with you, we want to worship with you, we want to go and watch football and cricket with you, we want to beat you at video games – in the same room so we can see the look on your face when we do.

But in order to do all that – we all need to take the COVID-19 jab. It's all of us in this together.

Things will slowly get back to normal. Well what people are calling the new normal. The reality is the new normal may mean needing a vaccine to do many of the things we now take for granted.

Because we love you – we want you to be safe and we don't want you to be left out or left behind. While other communities are rushing to get the vaccine and millions have already been vaccinated, some Black people in our community are being more cautious.

You have legitimate worries and concerns, we hear that. We know change needs to happen and that it's hard to trust some institutions and authorities.

But we're asking you to trust the facts about the vaccine from our own professors, doctors, scientists involved in the vaccine's development, GPs, not just in the UK but across the world including the Caribbean and Africa. Many of whom are our relatives, many of whom have made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the people of this country from this pandemic.

And the thousands who volunteered to be part of the vaccine trials so that we know it's safe and works for people of all ethnicities.

Don't let their sacrifice be in vain. Don't let your understandable fears be what holds you back. Don't let your concerns be the thing that widens racial inequality in our society. Don't let Black people continue to be disproportionately impacted by this terrible disease. Many in our community say they do not want to take the vaccine, much more than other groups. But the fact is we have been disproportionately affected by the virus, many of our loved ones have died. Don't let coronavirus cost even more Black lives.

We love you. We don't want you to get sick. We don't want you to die.

We know you love us too so please hear us and when your turn comes, take the

jab.

And once you do, tell cousin Mo to do the same (is he really my cousin?)

Let's do this together.

Thank you.

Lenny

## **Signatories to the letter**

- Dr Maggie Aderin Pocock, MBE
- Sir David Adjaye, OBE, architect
- Naomi Ackie, actor
- Sonita Alleyne, OBE, Master, Jesus College, Cambridge
- Baroness Valerie Amos, Master, University College Oxford
- Amma Asante, MBE, writer/director
- Adjoa Andoh, actor
- Zeinab Badawi, Journalist, Chair, Royal African Society
- Karen Blackett, OBE, GroupM UK CEO, WPP Country Manager
- Malorie Blackman, OBE, writer
- I. Stephanie Boyce, Deputy Vice President, Law Society
- Dr Margaret Casely-Hayford, CBE, Lawyer, Chair, Shakespeare's Globe, Chancellor, Coventry University
- Dr Nira Chamberlain FIMA FORS CSci PhD HonDSc, President of the Institute of Mathematics and its Applications
- Eric Collins, CEO, Impact X Capital
- Garth Crooks, OBE, ex-footballer/football pundit
- Professor Patricia Daley, Vice Principal at Jesus College, Oxford
- Reni Eddo-Lodge, aournalist and Author
- Chiwetel Ejiofor, CBE, actor
- Wilfred Emmanuel-Jones, MBE, The Black Farmer
- Ekow Eshun, writer and broadcaster
- Professor Kevin Fenton, London's Regional Director for Public Health England
- Simon Frederick, TV director and photographer
- George the Poet, spoken-word artist, poet
- Patricia Hamzahee, advisor, investor, philanthropist
- David Harewood, MBE, actor
- Kobna Holdbrook-Smith, MBE, actor
- Rev Rose Hudson Wilkin, Bishop of Dover MBE
- Chris Hughton, Football Manager at Nottingham Forest Football Club
- Dame Vivian Hunt
- Adrian Joseph, OBE, Managing Director, Group AI and Data Solutions at BT
- Kanya King, CBE, Founder MOBO Awards
- Dame Donna Kinnair, Chief Executive and General Secretary of the Royal College of Nursing
- Wol Kolade, Managing Partner at Livingbridge
- Carol Lake
- KSI (Olajide Olatunji), musician, YouTuber
- Baroness Doreen Lawrence

- Adrian Lester, CBE, actor
- Darren Lewis, Assistant Editor, Daily Mirror
- Denise Lewis, OBE, Olympic heptathlon gold medallist, TV Sports Presenter
- Ric Lewis, Executive Chairman, Tristan Capital Partners, Founder Black Heart Foundation
- Trevor Nelson, MBE, radio personality
- Thandie Newton, OBE, actor
- Dr Sandie Okoro, Senior Vice President and Group General Counsel, World Bank
- Sir Kenneth Olisa, Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London
- David Olusoga, OBE, historian and broadcaster
- Trevor Phillips, OBE, writer, broadcaster, businessman
- Professor Cynthia Pine, CBE, Professor of Dental Public Health, Queen Mary University of London
- Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol
- Dr Nicola Rollock, Distinguished Fellow, Faculty of Education at University of Cambridge
- Tom Shropshire, General Counsel, Diageo
- Lemn Sissay, MBE, author, poet and broadcaster
- Tevin Tobun, CEO and Founder of GV Group
- Alex Wheatle MBE, novelist
- Dame Sharon White, Chair of John Lewis Partnership
- Charlene White, TV news anchor, ITV
- Roy Williams, OBE, playwright
- Marcia Willis Stewart QC, Director, Birnberg Pierce
- Lord Simon Woolley, Founder and Director of Operation Black Vote
- Gary Younge, Professor, Manchester University and journalist