

MEN FACEBOOK LIVE – DAVID REGAN and DR MANISHA KUMAR (TRANSCRIPT)

What's in the vaccines? Does it contain animal or human products? And can it change your DNA or affect fertility?

David Regan: "The vaccines contain no animal products, they cannot change your DNA and they definitely do not affect fertility. We really need to dispel some of those myths away.

"The ingredients are published, it is very transparent and people can go and see on the official website exactly what is in the vaccines. But to reassure everybody they do not contain human or animal products, they cannot change your DNA."

Dr Kumar: "The language used. that it's mRNA vaccine can confuse people. It really doesn't have the ability to go into your DNA and change that. It's incredibly important that everyone does have it. I know a lot of patients who are vegan, or Muslim or are worried about the porcine content.

"There is no porcine content in these Covid vaccines. We might worry about this with flu, but with Covid, there is nothing in there that would worry me."

Were the vaccines tested on people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities too? How do I know they are safe?

Dr Kumar: "Yes they were tested on various ethnicities and populations. Different portions in different trials. I think they are safe. I am south Asian, I've had my vaccination, I've had Pfizer. My parents are south Asian, they have had AstraZeneca. I am quite comfortable with having that vaccination.

David Regan: "Both Pfizer and AZ involved people from Black, Black African and Asian communities in the trials. Both vaccines have been tested out on a diverse group across different countries so we are confident that they're effective for all our communities.

"That information is available for people to see, nothing is being hidden. They have been tested on all our communities and is safe for all our communities. I think we have seen with the over 80s a really good response across all our communities. We are concerned that as we go down the age groups, that there might be more 'vaccine hesitancy' across our Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities.

"So we are getting on the front foot. We have some fantastic clinicians and our local councillors that will be really promoting the key messages that the vaccines are safe. We really want to see all our communities take up this fantastic offer. It will protect them, it will protect their families and the wider community. So we just want to reassure people and make sure the uptake across all our communities is equitable."

Dr Kumar: "We have 75% uptake of our over 75s, and we are picking up the phone to those who haven't come and trying to work out why. We are trying to work out what it is we can do to help get them to a vaccination and to try and understand some of their concerns and try and get a really good idea which communities are struggling and what we can do to help support their decisions."

When asked if there were particular issues coming through on why people might not taking it up, Dr Kumar added: "the majority of people just want to wait. I think all of this has felt quite fast and therefore they're being asked to make a decision - there's so much in the media at the moment that it's a little bit overwhelming.

"A lot of it is 'I'll just wait until someone I know has it' or 'I'll see what my friends say' or 'I didn't know I could get transport there' or 'I didn't know I could have it in a different way'. The clinically extremely vulnerable are scared. We're seeing people in their 80s and 90s who haven't been out since March last year. They've lost their confidence so giving them an idea of what to expect and that it's Covid-safe can be that little bit of persuasion they need to come out and get it."

David Regan: "There's nothing better than a discussion with your GP to reassure you. It makes such a difference to have that personal contact over the phone and to encourage people and give options on how they can get the vaccine."

There are different types of vaccine - does it matter which one I have?

David Regan: "I know people may be concerned about the news about Germany and AstraZeneca and the over 60s but again, the trials show they are effective across all age cohorts. It doesn't matter which one you have. We have ordered across the country 103 million doses of the four vaccines you're hearing about.

All have been tested with a range of communities and all are safe. It's really great we have got so much as a country and the news last night [about the Novavax vaccine] was more welcome news about the availability of vaccines.

Dr Kumar: "Some people can't have one or the other. The Pfizer vaccine - it's not as easily transportable so if you can't get to one of the centres, it's going to be really difficult to get that one. While the Astra Zeneca vaccine is more portable and therefore we can get to people at home or in care homes which is so important. For those reasons no, I think both vaccines are equally valid and equally effective and definitely worth us persuading. Those with extreme allergies may prefer to have the Astra Zeneca vaccination, but we will be running both vaccinations in our communities in different ways."

Apart from vaccines, what else is the city doing to keep us safe? Will there be more community testing?

David Regan: "The basic core message remain - hands, face, space. Washing hands regularly, wearing masks when you're out in public. Social distance - 2 metres. The new variant doesn't require a different approach and all these measures still apply.

"We have a number of lateral flow testing sites across the city, they are 30-minute tests you don't have to wait for results they are available immediately. We have those sites now set up - they are for key workers at the moment. For those that have to go out to work, such as taxi drivers, security guards, shop workers - not just council and NHS workers - they can now access these lateral flow sites if they are asymptomatic. If they are symptomatic it is important they follow the other part of the process, which is a PCR test - we have number of these sites across the city.

"Once we move out of lockdown, we will have a community offer, lateral flow device test for asymptomatic cases to really try and nip it in the bud to stop that onward transmission. This will really make a difference in terms of people returning and adapting and getting back to some sense of normality.

"We've got a really good testing offering in the city and we will be really promoting that over the next few weeks for key workers.

"We will try and target the testing offer to the communities where we have seen high prevalence in the pandemic but low uptake of testing. So we can say to these communities and households 'come and get your lateral flow test so you can be sure you haven't got it' so we can really engage people and encourage those who have not come forward for testing to be tested - and also offer a package of support.

"It's really important that people feel they will get the support and advice they need from any testing offer. We can learn from the Liverpool mass testing approach, but we will be targeting our testing offer to specific communities but also it will remain in place for our key workers who will be able to get a lateral flow test twice a week and continue going to work, or self isolate if they test positive."

Where at the moment are you seeing the majority of cases being transmitted?

David Regan: "We certainly saw after Christmas an increase in household transmission. Recently, the majority of cases have been the 10-64, the working age range and the clue is there - it's people that have had to go out to work. We have had some outbreaks in workplaces, in supermarkets, in offices and unfortunately in some of our supported living and extra care facilities.

"That's where we have seen most of the outbreaks over the last month. But the good news is that the rate across Greater Manchester has come down over the last few weeks and the decrease has been significant. We'd like to see our over 60s rate come down more - we know if that comes down there will be less hospitalisations going forward. But thankfully we are on that downward slope, it's a slow descent so we have to reinforce social distancing, wearing masks, the key messages, because the virus is still around.

"The new variant is more transmissible so we do have to remind people that despite the vaccine, please stick to the rules."

Are you seeing cases being transmitted among children more with this new strain - and what's the plan for vaccinating children?

David Regan: "From London we saw there was a high number of cases of the new variant among secondary aged children. Professor Van Tam has highlighted that the new variant among older teenage children, is more transmissible. Therefore there is a look at whether it is appropriate to open primary schools first because amongst younger children, transmission rates are much lower - and they are actually doing studies into this right now so actually it's safe in terms of that onward transmission to consider opening primary schools first.

"It's important for secondary school children, in particular those doing exams, are able to get back into school and their education and that's why the testing programme will be available in both secondary and primary schools. In secondary schools it will be available for both pupils and staff so we can nip outbreaks in the bud and help kids remain in school.

"Schools should be the first to reopen and it will be primary schools, in my view, that will open first, followed quickly by secondary schools."

Dr Kumar: "The vaccine wasn't trialled on children before it was licensed so therefore Pfizer is 16 plus and Astra Zeneca 18 plus. There are some children who are really vulnerable and over 12 who with discussion with their consultant may be eligible for one of the vaccines. But we are doing trials with the younger cohorts to help develop a vaccine that's suitable for children

"I'm hopeful at the speed the development of the vaccine is happening that there will be more on vaccinating children as the year goes on."

I'm just recovering from covid and still have a cough and fatigue after four weeks. Can I still pass the virus on?

Dr Kumar: "No, he won't be able to pass the virus on, but he needs to speak to his GP. Because he has symptoms he needs to be looked at. Various people can really struggle post-covid with physical symptoms, fatigue, emotional symptoms as well as mental health. The whole post-covid syndrome we are getting better at understanding as we go through the pandemic as we get more experience with what people feel post-covid. But the best thing to do is pick up the phone and speak to his GP. There is support and help out there and I'd like to really understand what the symptoms are and to put the right intervention in."

David Regan: "And in dialogue with a clinician you can get advice on when it's appropriate to get the vaccine. People ask if they have had covid if they will still need the vaccine and the answer is yes, it's just agreeing the time gap between being symptomatic and getting the vaccine."

Do the vaccines presently being used protect against all the known variants?

David Regan: In terms of the UK variant there is really good evidence that the Pfizer and Astra Zeneca vaccine work effectively and the new vaccine, the Novavax vaccine was actually tested on the new variant in trials and it proved very effective. In fact, the Novavax vaccine was also tested on the South African variant and again there's confidence in its response to that.

"I think that the view is that with the South African variant investigations are still underway, and there are investigations into the Brazilian variant too. What scientists can - and they do every year with flu - is adapt the vaccines should the vaccines not be effective against the new variants. And we will see new variants but it will be a very agile and flexible response.

"In terms of the new UK variants the vaccines we have will be effective and we will just have to monitor the other variants across the world."

As an 'unpaid' carer, why are we not considered in the top vaccination group?

David Regan: "The JCVI has set out the cohorts for vaccination and we are very mindful particularly for our carers. I think many will be included in cohort six, which will include those with long term conditions and their carers.

"And many carers are over 50 as well so they will be included in cohorts one to nine. Those with people who are extremely clinically vulnerable we will be vaccinating them early too. So we are trying to make sure we do support our carers following the appropriate criteria but making sure they are not disadvantaged. We will be giving more information out as we move through the age cohorts."

Dr Kumar: "I think the JCVI has challenged all of us when looking at risk and vulnerability. The quicker we get through cohorts one to four, the quicker we will get through the other people in society. Everyone is worried and wants their vaccination and we want you to have it as quickly as we can deliver it to you. The first four cohorts are those most likely to suffer severe disease or death. Our hospitals are full. It doesn't mean other cohorts won't get covid.

"Most we have the most vulnerable vaccinated we can rapidly move through the other cohorts. We can vaccinate multi-generational households, so if you think that is a situation that would apply to you have a conversation with your GP and we can look at how and when you will be on the list to be vaccinated.

"But if you can encourage older members of your family to get vaccinated, the sooner we can get down to cohorts five and six. And definitely by Easter I think that is the intent to get down to that age group."

If I have allergies, would that be checked before I was vaccinated?

Dr Kumar: "With every vaccination we have a rigorous consent process. If you have an allergy what will happen is you should have a clinical review. It's the Pfizer vaccine where we had a couple of people right at the beginning who had a severe reaction. These people had Epipens and a history of severe allergic reaction. We haven't seen any allergic reactions since in Greater Manchester, not in either the Pfizer or Astra Zeneca vaccine which is really reassuring for our delivery teams.

"But if you have an allergy and are unsure which vaccine you should have, pick up the phone and speak to your GP. There are very few people who can't have either vaccine due to the extent of their allergies but this can be discussed with a GP to come to an informed choice."

When will transport workers be vaccinated? We are putting our lives at risk daily, same as NHS and care workers and shop workers. When are we going to get ours?

David Regan: "Any transport worker over 60, we won't be far off getting to you now. Any over 50, we've said by Easter. But the next phase after cohorts one to nine, the JCVI are now looking at all the occupational groups, police, teachers and transport workers as well. And I am very passionate that our transport staff, our supermarket staff, who have been key workers - not just health and social care staff - are treated equally.

"And we know from some of the data around illness and death they have been disproportionately affected. So I am hopeful and confident the JCVI will do the right thing and there will be a fair approach to those transport workers and that they will get it soon after we get to the end of cohort nine. But they will get it anyway if they fall into the first nine cohorts.

Dr Kumar: "Even when you are vaccinated it doesn't give 100% immunity it's not a green card because transmission and how much protection it offers from transmission we still don't know yet. So if you are in a key worker role, even if you have been vaccinated, hands, face, space. All these precautions are just as important and I think that's the take home message - have the vaccination but don't stop doing everything else the public health teams are asking you to do to stop the spread."