



Race Disparity Unit

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Second quarterly report on addressing COVID-19 health disparities and response to the WESC report *Unequal impact? Coronavirus and BAME people*

I am writing to inform you that I am publishing today my second quarterly report to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care on progress to address COVID-19 health disparities among ethnic minority groups. I am also enclosing the government response to the Women and Equalities Committee's report *Unequal impact? Coronavirus and BAME people*, published on 15 December.

Second quarterly report on COVID-19 disparities

Based on the findings of my first quarterly report, which was published on 22 October, I concluded that ethnicity in its own right did not appear to be a factor in the disproportionately higher infection and mortality rates from COVID-19 for ethnic minority groups. Rather, the evidence at that time showed that a range of socioeconomic and geographical factors such as occupational exposure, population density and household composition, coupled with pre-existing health conditions, appeared to be driving these disparities. This underlined the importance of government departments developing interventions to mitigate these impacts, such as measures to protect frontline transport workers, a large proportion of whom are from an ethnic minority background.

That conclusion has been reinforced by subsequent studies over the last quarter, which are summarised in my [latest](#) report.

These studies have also shown that the direct impacts of COVID-19 have improved for ethnic minorities as a whole during the early part of the second wave of the pandemic. For example, in the first wave, Black African people were 4.5 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than White British people, but in the early part of the second wave the risk of death was the same for both groups. At the same time, however, the second wave has had a much greater impact on some South Asian groups. These inequalities appear to be driven primarily by differences in exposure and infection. Those from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds are more likely to reside in deprived areas, in larger households and in multigenerational families, while a higher proportion of Pakistani and Bangladeshi men work in occupations with a greater level of exposure.

The government's response to the pandemic - and to the disproportionate impact it has had on certain groups - will continue to be driven by the latest evidence. We will continue to

consider policy interventions to address COVID-19 disparities, with a particular focus on those groups most disproportionately impacted by the second wave.

The other major development since my first report is the approval of three COVID-19 vaccines and the subsequent roll out of the vaccination programme. The UK's world-leading programme has already vaccinated over 18 million of those most at risk from COVID-19.

The government will continue to make every effort to ensure that those from ethnic minority groups who are eligible for a vaccine have the confidence to come forward and be vaccinated. My report summarises our communications efforts over the last quarter which include campaigns to tackle the misinformation about vaccination and promote uptake.

The report also sets out the extensive measures taken across government – both centrally and at a local level - to tackle COVID-19 disparities including:

- Releasing £23.75m in funding to local authorities in January under the Community Champions scheme, which I announced in my first report.
- Running successful pilots of community-led, localised, asymptomatic testing at places of worship in ethnically diverse areas.
- Using places of worship, such as the Al-Abbas Islamic Centre in Balsall Heath, as vaccination centres to build trust within the local community and encourage vaccine uptake among at-risk groups.
- Including transportation workers, a significant proportion of whom are from an ethnic minority background, in mass testing pilots covering the Christmas travel period. These are now being rolled out more widely.
- Investing a further £4.5m in funding for four new research projects looking at the health, social, cultural and economic impacts of COVID-19 on ethnic minority groups.

My report sets out a number of next steps with this work, which will also take account of any relevant recommendations made by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities, which is due to report to the Prime Minister very shortly.

Government response to 'Unequal impact? Coronavirus and BAME people'

I am grateful to the Committee for taking the time to consider this important issue. The government response sets out our position on each of the recommendations from your report, some of which have already been implemented, while others are being picked up under existing streams of work.



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