



GRASSROOTS BLACK LEFT

Labour African, Caribbean and Asian Socialists

NEWS RELEASE

Why Black people should take the Covid-19 vaccine

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It's been much-reported African Caribbean and Asian people have been hardest hit by Covid-19. But, despite understandable reservations based on historical cases of medical racism, campaign group Grassroots Black Left (GBL) believes this is the reason why they should get vaccinated. GBL reached agreement after it held a heart-searching Zoom debate among doctors and lay people, who were supporters and opponents of vaccination.

Although there has been justified mistrust over the government's pronouncements throughout the pandemic, GBL accepts there is a worldwide consensus from public health bodies that vaccination plays an essential part in substantially reducing the number of people put in hospital and deaths from Covid-19 infection.

Dr Mursheda Chowdhury, convenor of GBL's Health Workers Group, said: "Given that in the UK, people of African, Caribbean and Asian origin have been the hardest hit by the pandemic, they need access to all available measures that protect their health, including the vaccine, to fight this terrible virus."

Sceptics: In the GBL Zoom meeting (see the attachment) Dr Bob Gill, who is a working GP, NHS campaigner, and producer of the acclaimed documentary film *The Great NHS Heist*, led an impassioned discussion about the Covid-19 vaccine with members of GBL's Health Workers Group, of which he is a member. The group was initially sceptical – reflecting the "hesitancy" in Black communities. But Dr Gill swayed GBL to come to an overwhelming decision in favour of vaccination by, for instance, telling the group exactly who some of the most vocal "anti-vaxxers" were. He said "completely bogus health information" was coming from "the right-wing in the States, who are quite happy for Black people and poor people to die off". GBL agrees with experts like him that the risks of Covid-19 infection, without the protection offered by the vaccine, far outweigh any risks posed by the vaccine itself for most adults, even though at present, because of the newness of the vaccines available, it is not yet determined for how long this immunity will last.

We accept that this will be ascertained over the next few months but believe delaying vaccination, while waiting for this data to emerge, would cost many more lives. We recommend that people with serious health conditions take advice from their GP should they have any concerns.

Pamphlets (<https://bit.ly/3qHpJhh>): Dr Chowdhury said: “We have produced two pamphlets: *Black People Racism and the Covid-19 Pandemic* and *Supporting Black Workers in Health and Social Care: A Blueprint for Action* which go into more detail about the inequalities that have led to the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on marginalised communities.”

Medical racism: GBL fully acknowledges the mistrust that people from African Caribbean and Asian communities feel towards “Big Pharma”, which has a track record of not abiding by the ethical principles in research on human subjects as outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki, particularly in well-documented cases in the Global South involving Black people who have been experimented on.

Dr Chowdhury said: “The legacy of historical medical racism as well as the everyday lived experience of people experiencing racism within healthcare compound our sense of fear and mistrust. However, this vaccine is being rolled out universally in the UK and not selectively to people from so-called ‘minority communities’ and millions of people have been vaccinated in the UK and worldwide.”

GBL says, alongside vaccination, the government must ensure other Covid-safety measures, particularly in workplaces are implemented, and vaccination must not be used as a tool by employers to exploit workers.

Informed consent: The ethical principle of informed consent must be adhered to so that vaccination is voluntary and consent is based on an individual’s ability to weigh up the risks and benefits. But GBL recognises the science is complex and hence it has been easy to mislead lay people about exactly how vaccines work.

GBL recommends this video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_gnHctWl6s by Dr Winston Morgan, reader in toxicology and clinical biochemistry at the University of East London, where he explains the science and discusses the pros and cons of the vaccine, so that people can feel more informed. He debunks some common misconceptions.

Young people: Even though young, healthy people are less likely to suffer severe disease, their ability to pass on the infection to the more vulnerable is why a significant proportion of the population must be vaccinated for any vaccination programme to succeed. It is normal and expected that some people will experience pain at the injection site and flu-like symptoms in the immediate aftermath of receiving the vaccine. But at most, this will only last a few days.

Migrants: GBL joins other organisations, campaigning for refugee and migrant rights, in calling for access to vaccines for all people regardless of immigration status and place of residence, including the homeless. We have produced a position statement on Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seeker (attached). GBL deplores vaccine nationalism and the race by so-called first-world countries to secure vaccine supplies at the expense of poorer countries. As this is a global pandemic, international cooperation is essential in controlling its spread. Universal access to healthcare, including the Covid-19 vaccine, is a basic human right and essential for any serious public health strategy that truly aims to reduce the adverse consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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