

Variant of Concern VOC-21-APR-02
Briefing for South Asian Community Groups and Organisations

Please share this message with South Asian Communities

VOC-21-APR-02 is the technical term for the new variant of concern that was first identified in India.

This variant is thought to be driving the increase in Covid cases being seen in younger adults across the North West, particularly in Bolton and Blackburn.

It is normal for any virus to change over time. Coronavirus is the same – and our vaccines are very effective in preventing serious illness against the strains. It's also very normal – as with the flu vaccine – to tweak the vaccines or give boosters against new strains as they develop.

We are briefing community organisations and leaders for South Asian communities because the increase in cases has been particularly high, especially among the Pakistani and Indian population. It is important that we take steps to protect ourselves, our families and communities.

The public health team in Manchester has advised that

- evidence that is being analysed suggests that this variant is more transmissible – or easier to spread.
- it has spread very quickly in other areas and so could spread very quickly among Manchester residents
- people who have not been vaccinated are more likely to catch the new variant and spread it to others
- we need to be cautious as the Covid restrictions in order to protect our communities- especially older family members who may not have been vaccinated and would be more vulnerable to severe disease

The public health team are also looking at providing vaccination, in line with JCVI guidance, to younger people in some parts of the city where the risk of the variant of concern spreading quickly is higher - as they are doing in Blackburn- they will keep us up to date with plans for this and how people can access the vaccine when it is available. As per national recommendations, any vaccine that is offered to people under 40 will either be Pfizer or Moderna.

What should we do now?

It's really important that everyone who has symptoms, goes for a Covid test – that way we can monitor and pick up any new cases or strains very quickly and take the right action.

In addition, if you don't have symptoms, Lateral flow or "rapid antigen" tests are free and you can get them and test twice a week.

Stay cautious, even though the rules are changing it is still important to

- limit the number of different people and households you mix with
- meet outdoors wherever possible
- keep washing hands, wiping surfaces, wearing masks or face coverings when needed,
- keeping rooms ventilated and social distancing
- get your vaccine as soon as it is offered to you

If anyone needs help and support with food, medical supplies or other COVID-related support they can call Manchester's Community Response Hub on Freephone: 0800 234 6123 or text: 078600 22876 or email COVIDSupport@manchester.gov.uk, (MON-FRI 9am-5pm). Messages responded to by the next working day. The hub can help with

- Access to food
- Delivery of medication
- Combating loneliness
- Managing fuel top-up payments
- Getting access to services online