

CAMPAIGN LETTER TO COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS



Assalamu'alaykum

Re: Flu Vaccination campaign in UK Muslim communities.

We write to you following the publication of "the national flu immunisation programme 2020 to 2021 – update" circular that was published on 5 August 2020 by the Department of Health & Social Care. Evidence suggests that Muslim communities in the UK have suffered more serious health effects from the Covid-19 virus (Wellcome Trust, August 2020), and death rates amongst Muslims have been disproportionately higher (Office for National Statistics, June 2020). Influenza (flu, another viral infection) threatens to further complicate the health of our communities as our NHS deals with both the Covid-19 pandemic and additional pressures that flu and seasonal illnesses in winter bring.

What is flu & why is it so dangerous in the time of Covid-19?

Flu affects our immune system making it easier for us to contract other infections (such as Covid-19 or pneumonia). For those suffering from a long-term illness, contracting flu at the same time can make their condition worse and / or last longer. Vaccination against flu has been shown to protect us by stopping the spread of it in households and communities (schools, mosques etc), reduce admissions to hospital, and number of deaths in the winter – especially of our elders. **But** flu vaccination levels have dropped across the UK in recent years, particularly in Muslim communities.

For this reason, we are launching Operation Vaccination, a campaign to increase awareness in Muslim communities about the importance of flu vaccination this winter. This has the potential to save thousands of lives insha'Allah, as past flu outbreaks have caused between 4,000 to 22,000 deaths in England alone.

Do all flu vaccines contain pork gelatine?

No. There are two main types of flu vaccine available in the UK:

- Injectable flu vaccine (used mainly for adults) - These do NOT contain pork gelatine;
- Nasal spray vaccine (called "Fluenz Tetra" used in all children from age 2 – 18 years old except those that are allergic to the vaccine) - This DOES contain pork gelatine.

Pork gelatine is considered religiously impermissible (haram) by many Muslim jurists. Whilst there are some jurists who would permit pork-based gelatine for the purpose of vaccines, at a practical level, most of the British Muslim community have, and will continue to, avoid such vaccines out of fear that they are haram.

After years of campaigning, alhamdulillah, the NHS in England & Wales will now join Scotland and Northern Ireland in offering the injectable flu vaccine (which does not contain pork gelatine) for those parents who object to the nasal spray Fluenz Tetra vaccine on religious grounds for their children this winter. **Everyone can now get a flu jab that has no pork gelatine.**

Increasing vaccination uptake in Muslim communities

We are therefore encouraging all Muslim families to vaccinate their children as part of the routine schedule, as well as ensuring those who are older and at risk also get their flu jabs. Operation Vaccination is a campaign to help local communities to make contact with their local commissioning organisation (control the budget for local health services) and public health body (who help organise flu vaccination campaigns and measure their effectiveness). See below for more information.

Attached is a toolkit containing materials to get you started in protecting your community and safeguarding our nation.

We urge you for Allah SWT's sake and for your communities to make the most of the opportunity to make a difference this year and for the future by taking part. Assalamu'alaykum.

For more information, please get in touch with us at covid@britishima.org or visit www.operationvaccination.com

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Why are we launching this campaign?

The flu vaccine is routinely offered every autumn to:

- All school aged children;
- All people aged over 65 years;
- Anyone with a long term illness (e.g. asthma, heart problems, diabetes etc);
- Anyone who cannot fight infection properly i.e. the immunocompromised (e.g. cancer patients, people on certain types of medication);

One of the main reasons for vaccinating children is because they more easily spread infections like flu because of their poor understanding of personal hygiene and having close contact to others (e.g. other sick children, parents, grandparents, teachers etc). If children are vaccinated they are less likely to spread the infection to others so others in the community are also protected.

If Muslim communities around the UK can raise their vaccination rates, we as Muslims in the UK will have shown the Government and industry that there is a demand for medicines that are compatible with Muslim dietary laws and insha'Allah we will continue to campaign for this. If local communities struggle to make an effort this year, we may find that the non-pork alternative will again no longer be offered in England & Wales.

Our Easy “7 Step Plan”:

As you know our organisations have produced several public information materials for the Muslim community during the Covid-19 pandemic and have been proactively and successfully involved in safeguarding mosques and Muslim communities pre and post-lockdown.

Our new Operation Vaccination information pack contains several useful and important tools for you to use in your town / locality. These have been successfully piloted in a town in the UK by a Muslim organisation to help them become members of their local community flu vaccination team, cooperating with their local officials.

As more tools become available, we will forward them to you but for now, we ask that you please utilise this toolkit, involving willing and qualified volunteers, to quickly make contact with your local officials so you can also help your communities stay safe from flu (and possibly from Covid-19) this winter.

The “7 point Plan” involves:

- 1. Identify:** Your team members & support group.
- 2. Know:** The facts (a little about Fluenz and flu vaccination).
- 3. Familiarise:** Your team with the toolkit content.
- 4. Contact:** Your local CCG & public health officials and set agenda points for discussion.
- 5. Prepare:** Important points to discuss in your own strategy meeting.
- 6. Meet:** As part of your local Flu Vaccination Team and plan your cooperative approach;
- 7. Go!** Begin your campaign & look out for additional toolkit content release.

Vaccinate & Save Lives!

Time is short and a lot needs to be done but working together, with or without your local health officials (preferably with!), we can help keep our nation healthier and, insha'Allah, save lives and protect families from the tragedies we have all witnessed in recent months.

We would welcome feedback and examples of progress / good practice from yourselves as we roll out this work so we can develop the most effective campaign to ensure all those who need vaccines are able to get them. We need to ensure that everyone who is offered it, is vaccinated this winter to deliver the **“Biggest flu vaccination programme in history”**.

Please get in touch with us at covid@britishima.org or visit www.operationvaccination.com