The Covid vaccine developed by Oxford University and the drugmaker Astrazeneca has been approved for use in Britain, allowing the government to accelerate its immunisation campaign.

The jab was authorised by the Medicines and Healthcare
Products Regulatory Agency this morning amid rising concerns about the new fast-spreading coronavirus strain.

Whitehall officials have long regarded the Oxford jab as a game-changer because it should be relatively easy to distribute and will be available in significant volume. Unlike the Pfizer-Biontech vaccine, which must be stored at ultra-low temperatures, it can be kept in a normal fridge.

Astrazeneca said that the first doses would be released today and vaccinations could begin early in the new year. At least four million doses are believed to be available immediately for use, with more waiting to be decanted into vials.

The authorisation is for two full doses of the Oxford vaccine to be given, with a gap of between four and 12 weeks between them. In clinical trials, that dosing regimen was 62 per cent effective in preventing symptomatic Covid and none of the volunteers who received it developed serious disease.
After being warned that vaccinations must accelerate to ease the burden on the NHS, the government also announced a shift in its immunisation strategy. The priority will now be to give as many high-risk individuals as possible a first dose of either the Oxford vaccine or the rival jab from Pfizer, administration of which began three weeks ago.

The government believes that this will maximise the number of people who get some “meaningful protection” from one dose. The recommendation was made by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, an independent panel of experts.

A spokesman for the Department of Health and Social Care said that everyone would still receive their second dose and that this would be within 12 weeks of their first. The second dose completes the course and is important for longer term protection.

“From today the NHS across the UK will prioritise giving the first dose of the vaccine to those in the most high-risk groups. With two vaccines now approved, we will be able to vaccinate a greater number of people who are at highest risk, protecting them from the disease and reducing mortality and hospitalisation,” the spokesman said.

“The JCVI's independent advice is that this approach will
maximise the benefits of both vaccines. It will ensure that more at-risk people are able to get meaningful protection from a vaccine in the coming weeks and months, reducing deaths and starting to ease pressure on our NHS.”

Matt Hancock, the health secretary, told Times Radio that the approval of the Oxford vaccine would allow the UK to exit “a pandemic situation” by the spring. “Now that we have two vaccines being delivered, we can accelerate,” he said. “How fast we can accelerate will be determined by how fast the manufacturers can produce. But what I can tell you is that I now have a very high degree of confidence that by the spring enough of those who are vulnerable will be protected to allow us to get out of this pandemic situation.”

He added that enough vaccine doses had been ordered to cover the entire adult population of the UK and that clinically vulnerable people and health and social care workers would be prioritised. “After that, this vaccine will be available for the under 50s,” he added.

Boris Johnson described the news as a “triumph for British science” and said that the country would “now move to vaccinate as many people as quickly as possible”.

The government has already ordered 100 million doses of the Oxford vaccine, enough to vaccinate 50 million people.

Data published in the *The Lancet* this month shows that the vaccine was 62 per cent effective in preventing Covid-19 in a group of 4,440 people given two standard doses.
It offered 90 per cent protection in a group of 1,367 people given a half first dose followed by a full second dose. The overall *Lancet* data set out the full results from clinical trials involving more than 20,000 people.

Professor Andrew Pollard, director of the Oxford Vaccine Group and chief investigator of the Oxford trial, said this morning: “The regulator's assessment that this is a safe and effective vaccine is a landmark moment, and an endorsement of the huge effort from a devoted international team of researchers and our dedicated trial participants.

“Though this is just the beginning, we will start to get ahead of the pandemic, protect health and economies when the vulnerable are vaccinated everywhere — as many as possible as soon possible.”

Daniel Altmann, professor of immunology at Imperial College London, who was not involved with the vaccine development, said: “This is the fruition of decades of ground-breaking vaccinology and hard graft by the team at the Jenner in Oxford.

“It couldn’t be more timely and desperately needed. At a time when we see the pandemic accelerating beyond our control, a rapid, efficient vaccination programme with good population coverage is our only way out.

“This vaccine induces good levels of neutralising antibodies and T cells. With two vaccines now in the roll-out and very substantially more doses, it starts to look realistic that this could be achievable by the spring or early summer.”
CORONAVIRUS

The Oxford vaccine

Researchers from the Oxford Vaccine Group and Oxford’s Jenner Institute are working on a viral vector vaccine

1

The genetic code for a section of the Covid-19 virus, the immunogenic protein known as the S protein, is encoded into a different, harmless, virus. This forms the vaccine.

2

A person is injected with the vaccine and the harmless virus infects their cells.

3

The human cells then produce the spike protein which induces an immune response: the production of antibodies and other cells that can combat the virus if the person...
Shares in AstraZeneca, which is not profiting from the vaccine, rose 0.4 per cent, or 33p, to £74.95 this morning.

The FTSE 100 opened broadly flat - up just 0.2 per cent - having reached its highest levels since March after Britain and Brussels finalised a free trade agreement.

The government said yesterday that Britain had enough batches of the Pfizer jab to maintain the pace of vaccination programme. However, scientists said that the campaign would have to speed up significantly to reduce the burden on the NHS.

Ministers were told that weekly vaccination rates would have to rise sevenfold from the levels achieved so far to stop pressures on swamped intensive care units surpassing those seen during the peak of the first wave.

Neil Ferguson, a government adviser, told the BBC that a target of two million doses of vaccine being administered every week was “what we need to be getting to, very quickly indeed”.
UK vaccination rates have been running at about 280,000 a week, according to the most recent NHS figures.

Professor Ferguson was giving his backing to a study from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, which predicted that Tier 4 restrictions would have to be maintained across England, along with school closures in January and the two million vaccinations a week, in order to limit the burden on intensive care wards to within the levels seen in the spring.

The study said that there was no evidence that the new variant was associated with increased disease severity. However, because it appears to spread far more quickly it has the potential to create larger epidemic waves with more cases. “It may be necessary to greatly accelerate vaccine roll-out to have an appreciable impact in suppressing the resulting disease burden,” it said.

Margaret Keenan, a 91-year-old grandmother, became the first person to receive a second dose of the Pfizer-Biontech vaccine yesterday. The booster shot was given at Coventry’s University Hospital, three weeks after she made history by becoming the first person in the West to be vaccinated against Covid-19 outside a clinical trial.

A spokesman for the prime minister said that 22 consignments of the Pfizer jab had been delivered by December 25 and that vaccinations were on track to progress at the rate of manufacture. “We have sufficient doses to maintain our vaccination programme as it continues to expand,” he said.

The Pfizer vaccine must be kept in ultra-cold conditions
of minus 70°C and can be moved only four times before it must be used. This presents a difficult logistical hurdle, since by the time the vaccine reaches Britain it has already been moved three times since leaving Pfizer's factory in Belgium.

This week Pfizer said that deliveries to eight European countries had been held up by a day because of a “problem in the loading and shipment process” at the factory in Belgium, believed to be related to temperature control.

The Oxford vaccine can be kept at normal fridge temperatures, allowing it to be handled in the same way as other widely used drugs.

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Again there seems to be a lack of transparency and openness, is the:

1+1 regime 62% or > 90% effective?
1/2 +1 regime >90% effective in all age groups?
If it is 100% effective in stopping hospital admission, is it also 100% effective in stopping transmission so workers and HCP in particular do not have to take time off work to self-isolate?
ChrisH 12 SECONDS AGO | Budge

Why not wait for the full MHRA announcement later today?

Reply  Recommend

Teflon Don  NOW | ChrisH

Because he needs to complain about something 24/7

Reply  Recommend

Alex Simmonds 31 SECONDS AGO | Budge

70% after first dose just been announced. That's fantastic news.

Reply  Recommend

Paul Rogers 3 MINUTES AGO | Edited

Embarrassing to listen to genuine experts this morning on the BBC having to correct Hancock on the time required to get vaccines administered to sufficient number of people that life can get back to normal. It clearly will not be in 10-12 weeks as Hancock says - why is he allowed to spout pure nonsense and keep his job unless it is simply to make others look good.

Reply  Recommend
It depends on the rate vaccination surely? 
Who knows what that will be. 1 million per week? 
2? 300,000? 
If there's an expert who can predict the future 
then he'd definitely be worth listening to. 
Who were these experts?

The more I think about this the better it gets, though we do 
need a good proportion of us to take the vaccine. It's not 
just about me - it will also lift the fear that I could pass on 
the disease to someone else who could die of it. I didn't 
have a severe case but that's no doubt an accident of 
genetics, age, immune response and regular taking of 
vitamin D. If the vaccine can reduce the severity of the 
disease in the 38% who catch it, to the point where they 
don't need hospitalisation, that is a seriously good result.

I'd happily donate the approx £3 for the cost of my dose on 
the basis that it could help to pay for vaccinations in 
countries where it's harder to roll out vaccinations. No one 
should be charged to be protected, but a lot of freely given 
donations could help.

Excellent news. The end to this awful virus is now in sight.
jamesPeter 13 SECONDS AGO | Tiberius

oh Dear ... guess who hasn’t really read anything about vaccines ( other than what they see on Facebook )

☐ Reply 1 ⭐ Recommend

JMD67 7 MINUTES AGO | Tiberius

You understand what 90% means right?

John Townsend 12 MINUTES AGO

You guys in thge UK are very fortunate at the way and speed the vaccines are being rolled out. We in South Africa are now told we will only receive the vaccines in the 2nd quarter of next year for the rollout to start. The government were even two weeks late in paying a deposit to the WHO whiih have a fund to ensure smaller countries get a fair share of vaccines. But wait... our Chief Justice - probably the second highest position in government - warned the public to beware of the virus as its the devils way to insert 666 into our bodies - and it will alter our DNA. And you guys think you've got problems!

☐ Reply 5 ⭐ Recommend

Prof Bob 18 SECONDS AGO | Tiberius

There will be concerns with the flu vaccine, but the evidence was that none of those unlucky to be infected progressed to severe disease, i.e., needed hospitalisation. Unlike the Pfizer trials the Oxford trials deliberately sought asymptomatic infection by regular swabbing of all participants. That is a big difference in method and explains why there is a significant difference between the Pfizer/Merck vaccine and this one. 

☐ Reply ⭐ Recommend

SFB58 Edited

Ha. I'm in SA too and the government's vaccine performance has been woeful. Yet R10 billion for SAA! That said the Oxford vaccine was trialed on tens of thousands of South Africans, one would hope surplus was sent here ASAP it cannot be that western companies are happy to use local guinea pigs then horde the positive results

☐ Reply ⭐ Recommend

The US just found the first confirmed case of UK virus in Colorado.  

The RedCoat Virus.  
Dirty Brits.  
Got a second rate vaccine now and they are spreading RedCoat worldwide! Stop all trade with them, do not let them enter your country, stop all flights, you cannot trust them. They already said in their Parliament they do not care about international law or agreements.

Blah blah blah.  
Here comes the hatred again but this time it is against us. Forget overseas travel for a long time.
In fairness though the government has seemingly been blamed for everything up and to including the weather during this terrible time, sometimes really quite illogically, this is now when people who aren't scientists or epidemiologists should be able to do what we have every right to expect any competent government and it's agents to do... properly organise, fund and execute an extremely rapid, very large-scale vaccination program.

And no excuses. you've had the time to prepare and resource and this is within your control, so I for one will start really judging you from here.

Hancock failed
Lockdown
failed testing
failed PPE
failed communication
failed test and trace
with vaccination he needs to be kept as far away as possible. He knows only one thing, failure.

This is amazing news! Good for AstraZeneca. That could well be what is called the nick of time.

Or as a German might say, in "Ze nec a time"
Now
Illich Shem

Pretty puzzling then that so far we have lower cases/million than France, Spain, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, The Netherlands, Sweden, The Czech Republic, Croatia, Serbia etc etc despite a) being one of the most crowded countries in Europe and b) having carried out over twice the European average tests per million to find them. Perhaps our citizens are just very responsible.

JHB

Fantastic news! A real hurrah for the UK, one of the rare moments when I feel unusually patriotic.
I need a new suit, a hair cut, resume the gym membership, book a holiday, carry on with the wedding planning... there will be a world outside the front door again soon!

Taylor

Nope all travel from UK is banned now and will be banned completely 1.1.21.

A

If you're under 50, I'd wait until 2022 for all that. Also, a lot of countries will probably ask for proof of vaccination upon arrival. No vaccine, no holiday.