



UK Registered Charity Number: **1148910**

CAMDOCUK POSITION STATEMENT ON THE PFIZER-BIONTECH COVID-19 VACCINE, DECEMBER 2020

CamDocUK has over 45 registered members, including physicians in Infectious Diseases, Public Health, Internal Medicine and General Practice. A subgroup was created to review the current evidence and produce this statement. The statement is intended to help members of our community make decisions about taking the new Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine.

Key message: CamDocUK recommends the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine to members of the Cameroon community and other Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups. Current evidence suggests it is safe and effective. Please, continue to use protective measures after having the vaccine - keep wearing masks, practise hand hygiene and maintain (physical) social distancing.

Effects of the Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has had global, national and individual impact on lives and livelihood. There have been over 70 million people infected globally, with over 1.5 million deaths as of the 11th December 2020. In the UK there have been over 1.8 million reported infections and over 63,000 deaths. Many have lost loved ones and livelihood because of the pandemic which could now be classed as the worst pandemic so far in our lifetime!

The figure for Cameroon is similarly grim; with over 24,000 Covid-19 cases and 443 deaths so far. The Cameroonian diaspora community diaspora has similarly been affected. One of our music icons, Manu Dibango, unfortunately succumbed to the infection, among many others. Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) populations in the UK have been disproportionately affected in terms of number of Covid-19 infections and severity. Among these are numerous healthcare workers, CamDocUK members inclusive.

Covid-19 Therapeutics so far

Since the beginning of the pandemic, healthcare professionals have used a number of different drugs for treatment. Unfortunately, apart from steroids for patients requiring supplementary oxygen, most of these drugs have not been shown to be effective treatments. Our hope has mainly been on preventive measures, which themselves have been challenging to implement effectively. Scientists and healthcare professionals have therefore been working on other potential measures to help control the pandemic.

Vaccines against Covid-19 have turned out to be the game changer and are now our most powerful tool to fight this pandemic. As we know, vaccines help save millions of lives every year and have helped

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us eradicate debilitating infections such as Ebola disease. We believe the same will apply to the Covid-19 pandemic. With the discovery of an increasing number of vaccines for Covid-19 that are both effective and safe, the light seems at the end of the tunnel.

The Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 Vaccine

The Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine is a new type of vaccine called a messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine. The mRNA is synthetic, not extracted from the actual virus and is delivered in a tiny sphere of inert fatty material called a lipid nanoparticle. The mRNA carries instructions for making the virus's spike protein, which is the part the virus usually uses to attach to the human body and cause infection. It works like a "text message", that is, the mRNA delivers a message to the body's cells to produce a copy of the spike protein of the virus. Your body then reacts to the spike protein by producing antibodies, which then results in protection against the infection. Your body automatically deletes the mRNA "text message" so the mRNA will not stay in your cells. So, the vaccine cannot cause infection.

The Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine, like all vaccines, has gone through rigorous phase 1, 2 and 3 trials involving over 30,000 subjects in the USA, South Africa, Argentina and Brazil. The vaccine has been shown to be 95% effective in preventing infection and is also safe with very few recorded side effects. Currently, this is the only vaccine approved by the UK Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). This an independent body which evaluates all the research data on safety and effectiveness before making an independent decision about whether to approve it or not. There are likely to be other approved vaccines in the coming months.

Data from the phase 3 study of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine suggest side effects are minor, including pain at the site of the vaccination, mild fever, joint pain, muscle aches and headache. During the clinical trials, two deaths were reported in the vaccine arm, due to natural causes and unrelated to the vaccine. There were also 4 deaths in the placebo arm also due to natural causes. There have been two non-fatal cases of major allergic reactions since public vaccination started in the UK on the 7th December. This prompted the current guidance not to give this vaccine to people with a history of allergy.

The Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccination course involves two injections 3 weeks apart, and the vaccine is effective about a week after the 2nd dose of the vaccine. Once again, we advise that preventive measures must continue after having the vaccine, because no vaccine is 100% effective. Moreover, we do not yet know how long the immunity lasts.

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Our Advice to the Cameroonian and BAME Community

There is a real risk that if our community members do not receive this vaccine, we will widen the inequality which already exists - our community will continue to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic. We, therefore, recommend that members of the Cameroonian community take the vaccine when it is offered to them. We support the UK government's approach to prioritise vaccination of Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Further, we urge the UK government to support efforts by the WHO and other global vaccine alliances such as GAVI to ensure that Covid-19 vaccines are made available to African countries such as Cameroon.

CamDocUK will continue to review the evidence as it becomes available and produce further statements as the need arises. In the meantime, our next public engagement webinar is scheduled for 6pm (GMT) on 19 December 2020.

The CamDocUK Covid-19 ACTION GROUP including:

Dr Linda Bello, Chairperson, CamDocUK; Dr Emmanuel Nsutebu; Dr Kojo Ndenecho; Dr Judwin Ndzo; Dr Ben-Lawrence Kemah; Dr Vicky Kamwa; Dr Anna Mbene Ngah; Dr Montio Morgan; Dr Christian Akem; Dr Valentine Ngwa; Dr Pascal Che; Dr Theodore Ngatchu; Dr Nkwayep Mpafe; Dr Solomon Muna; Dr Elvis Ngassa; Dr Mike Fonso; Dr Osric Navti; Dr Noah Fongwen; Dr Asaah Nkohkwo.

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