Covid-19 vaccine humanist joint statement

As humanists we hold a wide variety of beliefs and don't always agree about everything. But we are united in believing that it is essential that as many people as possible are vaccinated against Covid-19.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has been devastating to our communities. It has led to significant loss of life and has caused vast disruption to everyone's daily lives. It has disrupted weddings, other rites of passage, and sometimes meant that people have had to put their whole life plans on hold. The toll all this disruption has had on people's mental health represents a growing crisis, as does the number of people falling into poverty.

We believe the vaccines authorised by the MHRA are the most significant way in which our society can control the pandemic, accompanied by widespread testing and isolation regimes. The vaccines may have been developed and approved for use at unprecedented speeds. But this is because of unprecedented upfront investment and collaboration. We believe they have been through the same rigorous approval processes that would be demanded of any medicine before it is authorised for emergency use. This includes double-blind randomised controlled trials and peer review. The evidence from those trials suggests that the vaccines are effective. The risks from contracting Covid-19 far outweigh any risks associated with some or all of them, depending on your age and underlying health conditions. That this is the case represents a towering scientific achievement.

Estimates vary on how many people would need to be vaccinated before coronavirus restrictions can be lifted entirely. But with new strains of the virus spreading more easily, it is clear that a large majority of adults need to be vaccinated. This includes those who are personally at low risk. This is because this contributes to the reduction in transmission of the virus. That, in turn, reduces the risk of further mutation of the strains of Covid-19 in the community.

As a result, we believe everyone who is medically able to be vaccinated against Covid-19 should take up the NHS's offer of an injection. The NHS has advice on when it expects to be able to offer the jab to different sections of the population. This includes whether you are able to have the vaccine and legitimate medical exemptions. If you are not sure whether you are able to receive the vaccine, please consult your GP or consult nhs.uk.

With the vaccine, we can begin to imagine an end to the pandemic. The Government hopes to be able to offer all adults the vaccine by September. It is hoped that booster vaccines can be quickly developed to better deal with new strains, if they prove needed. But we believe we can only get there, and resume our daily lives as they were, if we all take up this call.

Humanist leaders:

1. Andrew Copson, Chief Executive, Humanists UK
2. Fraser Sutherland, Chief Executive, Humanist Society Scotland
3. Kathy Riddick, Coordinator, Wales Humanists
4. Boyd Sleator, Coordinator, Northern Ireland Humanists
5. Samira Shackle, Editor, *New Humanist*

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