

Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> November 2020

## Press Release – #BlackHealthMattersGM

### **CAHN's Response to Government Decision to Give 2.7million Clinically Extremely Vulnerable People Free Vitamin D Over Winter**

CAHN welcomes the announcement by the Department of Health and Social Care to give free Vitamin D to 2.7million Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) during the winter<sup>1</sup>. However, we call for Government to go further and provide this to all Black people in view of the low level of vitamin D in majority of the Caribbean & African population. This is especially necessary given high levels of exposure to COVID-19 associated with the occupational risk in the working environment.

The Caribbean and African Health Network Greater Manchester (CAHN) has been running Health Hour sessions every Saturday morning since 2<sup>nd</sup> May to educate the Black community on prevention and management of health conditions which disproportionately impact on ethnic people. These sessions have been used to discuss COVID-19, keeping safe and reinforcing Public Health England messaging. All the Black GPs and Consultants have consistently encouraged our audience to get Vitamin D supplements to help boost the immune system. Faye Bruce, Chair of CAHN uses peer reviewed evidence to argue for adequate levels of vitamin D supplementation which confirms links to vitamin D deficiency and underlying health conditions such as cardiovascular disease

We are aware the links between ethnicity, Vitamin D and COVID-19 has been debated in Parliament following Kemi Badenoch MP, Equalities Minister's statement on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020. During the questions and answer session, David Davis MP raised the issue about the evidence-based Vitamin D deficiency prevalence across all groups disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. The Minister responded that SAGE's report on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020 did not find any evidence of Vitamin D and the deaths<sup>2</sup>.

Dr Joseph Omofuma (General Practitioner in Rochdale and CAHN's Clinical Lead for Mental Health) says 'Great news about CEV receiving free vitamin D, however government may want to extend this to black ethnic minority groups as they are also at an increased risk of COVID-19 and are more likely to have low vitamin D levels'

Dr Ngozi Edi-Osagie (Consultant Neonatologist) says 'COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on Black people in terms of morbidity and mortality. It is well known that populations with darker skin are at risk of lower levels of Vitamin D especially in the winter and therefore would urge the Government to include Black people on the list of vulnerable people. As a neonatologist I am also aware of the impact low levels of Vitamin D in pregnant mothers can have on newborn babies and would encourage the government to ensure that Black pregnant mothers are also considered a priority for receiving free Vitamin D supplements.

Mr Mohammed Kamara (Consultant in Emergency Medicine, Tameside) says 'There is an association between high serum vitamin D levels and benefits on many aspects of health, including viral infection. Overall, Black people lack normal serum levels of vitamin D, and the average of their serum levels is considerably lower than other populations.'

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/at-risk-groups-to-receive-free-winter-supply-of-vitamin-d>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRgOaUNfh2k>

Dr Patrice Arthur (Speciality Doctor in Gynaecology) says ‘Although the evidence for a link between Vitamin D deficiency and severe COVID-19 symptoms needs further research, preliminary data suggests such an association. We appreciate that these vitamins also protect bone and muscle function which may be affected during the winter months when many at risk and vulnerable persons need to stay indoors because of pandemic restrictions. People of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and any targeted advice for preventative measures to reduce the complication or infection rate of COVID-19 is a positive development for our community.’

There are stark and profound health inequalities facing people from the Caribbean & African community in the United Kingdom. These inequalities have been found along social, economic, environmental and racial lines and result in higher rates of morbidity and mortality than the White population. These disparities need addressing as part of systemic change including tailored advice and messaging as well as reviewing National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines<sup>3</sup> and benchmarking against majority population. It is disappointing that the last guidance issued by NICE on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020 makes limited reference to ethnicity considering numerous reports and evidence of disproportionate impact on COVID-19.

In Greater Manchester region where we have devolution, CAHN would work with system partners including The Mayor, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Health & Social Care Partnership, Manchester Health & Care Commissioning, Salford Clinical Commissioning Group and others to improve and sustain health outcomes across various indicators for the Caribbean & African community.

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|---------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Signed: | <i>Faye Bruce</i>   | <i>Charles Kwaku-Odoi</i>           |
|         | Faye Bruce<br>Chair | Charles Kwaku-Odoi<br>Chief Officer |

Note to editors:

1. The Caribbean & African Health Network is a non-profit organisation with a mission of reducing health inequalities in a generation for the Caribbean & African community by influencing policy and practice.
2. We recognise there are structural inequalities in our society and working with cross-sector partners In Greater Manchester and at national level to influence policy and practice.
3. We welcome partners to support our ‘Vitamin D for Increased Immunity Campaign’. This will provide Caribbean and African people living in Greater Manchester free packs including free tubs of Vitamin D (1000UI) supplements,

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<sup>3</sup> <https://pathways.nice.org.uk/pathways/vitamin-d-supplement-use-in-specific-population-groups#path=view%3A/pathways/vitamin-d-supplement-use-in-specific-population-groups/national-policy-and-strategy-for-preventing-vitamin-d-deficiency.xml&content=view-node%3Anodes-clarify-existing-guidance>

information leaflets on foods that are high in Vitamin D and COVID-19 messages, plus face masks and hand sanitisers.

4. CAHN Health Hour runs every Saturday from 11:00hrs on Zoom and YouTube with a Caribbean or African GP or Consultant presenting on particular health topic and taking questions.

More information – [www.cahn.org.uk/vitamind](http://www.cahn.org.uk/vitamind)

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