Department of Health & Social Care

From Maria Caulfield MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for
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Your Ref: LF69659

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The Rt Hon Lucy Frazer KC MP
By email to: lucy.frazer.mp@parliament.uk

26 January 2024

Dear Lucy,

Thank you for your correspondence of 20 December on behalf of your constituent Dr Edmund Fordham about vaccine safety. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in replying.

I am grateful to you for raising Dr Fordham's concerns.

There is no evidence linking excess deaths to COVID-19 vaccines. Analysis from the Office for National Statistics, published in August, shows that people who have had a COVID-19 vaccine have a lower mortality rate than those who have not been vaccinated.

Excess deaths can have many causes, but COVID-19 vaccination is not one of them. Statistics from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities published in October show that between October 2022 and September 2023 there were around 37,000 excess deaths in England. The main causes were cardiovascular disease, acute respiratory disease and diabetes.

The benefits of the vaccines in preventing COVID-19 and serious complications associated with it continue to far outweigh any currently known side effects in the majority of patients.

All vaccines used in the UK COVID-19 vaccination programme have been through a rigorous approval process. The UK has some of the highest safety standards in the world, and the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is globally recognised for requiring high standards of quality, safety and effectiveness. The mRNA COVID-19 boosters approved for use in the UK have also been through similar rigorous approval processes by the European Medicines Agency in Europe and the Food and Drug Administration in the US.

Each potential COVID-19 vaccine is assessed by teams of scientists and clinicians on a case-by-case basis. There are extensive checks and balances required by law at every stage of vaccine development, and it is only once each potential vaccine has met robust standards set by the MHRA that it will be approved for use.

No medicine or vaccine is completely risk-free, but the MHRA continually monitors the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines through its comprehensive COVID-19 Vaccine

Surveillance Strategy. This monitoring strategy is proactive and based on a wide range of information sources, with a dedicated team of scientists continually reviewing information to look for safety issues or any unexpected, rare events. Any information indicating a possible new safety concern is thoroughly evaluated, including through a review by the Independent Expert Working Group for COVID-19. Updated advice for healthcare professionals and patients is issued where appropriate.

As part of its surveillance, the MHRA reviews all suspected adverse drug reaction reports, known as Yellow Card reports, relating to COVID-19 vaccines. Any member of the public or health professional can submit information about suspected side effects through the Yellow Card scheme. However, the nature of Yellow Card reporting means that submitted events are not always proven side effects; some may have happened anyway, regardless of vaccination. This is especially the case when millions of people are vaccinated. Further information on Yellow Card reports in relation to COVID-19 vaccines can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-vaccine-adverse-reactions/coronavirus-vaccine-summary-of-yellow-card-reporting.

The Government is committed to further research into COVID-19 vaccines. Since the start of the pandemic, the National Institute for Health and Care Research has allocated over £110million in funding for COVID-19 vaccine research that has considered safety, including the monitoring of adverse reactions.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

MARIA CAULFIELD MP