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Study: minorities should be designated vulnerable to COVID

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Researchers writing in a *British Medical Journal* are recommending that ethnic minorities should be considered "extremely vulnerable" to COVID-19, a distinction that could give groups hard-hit by the pandemic earlier access to potentially life-saving vaccines.

This suggestion is one of six made by the authors of an analysis published Friday in The *BMJ*. They say "systemic racism" is the fundamental cause of higher coronavirus mortality among ethnic minority communities.

People from these communities were twice as likely to die from COVID-19 than the U.K.'s white majority population during the first wave of the pandemic, according to researchers from St. George's, University of London, Harvard University, the University of Manchester and Imperial College London.

"Based on these things, I think it is absolutely clinically, and from a public health point of view, justified to prioritize people to mitigate their risk of mortality from COVID," Dr. Mohammad Razai, one

of the report's authors, told The Associated Press. "When you place them in the extremely vulnerable category everything else will follow from that … including vaccination."

People from Black and South Asian backgrounds were more likely than white British people to live in deprived areas. This combined with increased levels of chronic disease and a greater preponderance of people in high-risk jobs who were unable to work from home led to higher rates of infection, hospitalization and admission to intensive care units, the study found.

In addition to including ethnic minority communities in the extremely vulnerable category, the study recommends that authorities work with these groups to develop COVID-19 prevention programs, prepare legally binding plans to decrease occupational exposure, and accelerate prevention programs targeting diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes that disproportionately affect minority communities and are linked to more severe illness from COVID-19.

The findings come as countries around the world ramp up mass vaccination programs, touching off lobbying by individuals and interest groups who want preferential access to the shots. So far, most countries have given priority to older people, who account for the vast majority of COVID-19 deaths, and the healthcare workers battling the pandemic.

In Britain, the government has set a goal of delivering a first dose of vaccine to everyone over 70, as well as frontline healthcare workers, nursing home residents and anyone whose health makes them especially vulnerable to the virus, by the middle of February.

But as syringes are being plunged into arms at hundreds of doctors' offices, pharmacies, hospitals and mass vaccination sites and hospitals, the jockeying continues. Teachers, police officers and

prison officers are among those arguing that they should be moved up the priority list because their public-facing jobs put them at greater risk.

The authors of the *BMJ* study say the data clearly show that public health officials should give special consideration to members of ethnic [minority](#) communities.

"We must prioritize people who are extremely vulnerable," Razai said. "And if people over 80, over 70 are more prone to getting (COVID) and they are in that extremely vulnerable category, so should people from [ethnic minority](#) communities based on the risk assessment."

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