



Views on vaccines from South Asian communities

October 2022

healthwatch
Bradford and District

Introduction

Healthwatch Bradford and District is the independent champion for people who use local health and social care services.

We're here to listen to the issues that really matter to people in Bradford district. We're entirely independent and impartial, and anything shared with us is confidential. We also help people to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice. Our sole purpose is to help make care better for people.

We were commissioned by NHS England to engage members of South Asian communities in Bradford district on their current feelings about vaccines offered by the NHS. Key questions included whether they currently receive or were planning to receive the annual flu vaccine, and whether they would be happy to receive both flu and COVID-19 vaccinations at the same appointment.

Participants in these conversations also discussed their health concerns, their knowledge of COVID-19 and flu, their confidence in the NHS and other public institutions to protect them from the impacts of COVID-19 and whether they trusted the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 and flu vaccines.

What we did

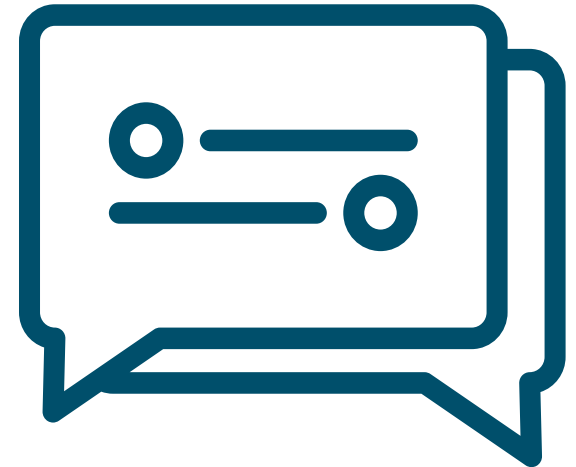
We met with Bangladeshi and Pakistani community leaders and discussed how best to hold focus groups and one-to-one conversations in their communities.

The Pakistani group organiser agreed to facilitate a male-only focus group with a Healthwatch representative present to take notes.

It was arranged that the focus group for the ladies in the Pakistani community would be held by a woman working for the group during one of their group meetings. Their feedback was reported back to us via email.

The men's group was held with eight members taking part in emotional and insightful conversations on what is clearly a polarising subject.

The Bangladeshi community leader invited Healthwatch to join them for the day to attend one of their ladies' classes. They then invited a group of men in the afternoon for a focus group.



**In total, views
were gathered
from**

28

**men and women
from both
communities**



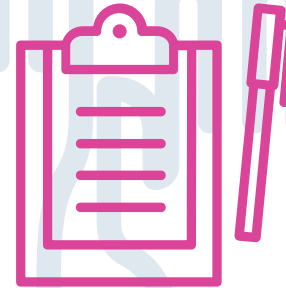
8 Pakistani
men aged
18-81



5 Bangladeshi
women aged
26-50



6 Pakistani
women aged
28-71



9 Bangladeshi
men aged
33-82

What we heard

51% wanted to have their COVID-19 and flu vaccines on different days

82% are vaccinated against COVID-19

However, views varied between the Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups. **13 out of 14** of the Bangladeshi group were vaccinated and **6 out of 9** of the Pakistani group.

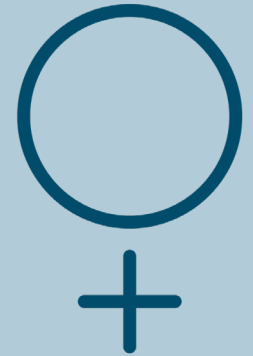


We heard that members of the Pakistani groups in general were offended and incensed by the use of imams in the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine, saying they felt “**religiously manipulated**”. Although they said that despite this, once their imam gave their advice they did mostly follow it and get vaccinated.



However, members of the Bangladeshi community said they felt grateful for the imams getting involved in endorsing the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out, and as soon as their imam advised them to have the vaccine, none questioned it.

We heard that across both communities there was a lot of concern, both from men and women, over changes to women's cycles and other gynaecological issues after they were given the second vaccine. This mass shared experience left them feeling as though the government was hiding things from them.



Overall, most negative feelings and thoughts about the COVID-19 vaccines were expressed by members of the Pakistani community.

Insights from individual focus groups

Pakistani men

COVID-19 and flu vaccines



One man, 43, believed the development of COVID-19 vaccines was rushed through and there was no way of knowing all of the effects on a variety of races. He was not vaccinated and has no plans to, including the flu vaccine.

He would be questioning any healthcare he and his family are offered in the future, even though prior to the pandemic he had never questioned his care or vaccines given to his children. The COVID-19 vaccine roll-out and what he felt was a lack of responsibility from the NHS has left him feeling that it cannot be trusted. He also felt the government and the NHS had used a media fear campaign to frighten people into getting vaccinated. He said women in his community are talking about problems and changes with their monthly cycles after their second dose of COVID-19 vaccine, and felt this demonstrated a lack of research completed on the vaccines prior to roll-out.



Where younger members of the group were concerned, one 18-year-old said he was not sure if he wanted to have the COVID-19 vaccine as he doesn't know anything about the risk. Another 18-year-old has not yet had COVID-19 vaccinations, while a 19-year-old has only been vaccinated because it was stipulated by travel requirements. Another member of the group, aged 20, has had two jabs but is undecided on more.



An 81-year-old man said he always has his flu vaccine but wonders why people still can get ill after they have had the jabs. He had to be vaccinated as he has had throat cancer and was classed as vulnerable.

He has had both flu and COVID-19 vaccinations at the same time previously and had no issues with doing it in the future.

One member of the group, aged over 50, was fully vaccinated and planned to keep up with all his boosters in future. He said he understood that there had been misconceptions over the vaccine and appreciated that his age would be a factor in how poorly he might feel after any vaccine.

He said he had received three COVID-19 vaccinations so far – one at his mosque, one at hospital and one at a local clinic.



One member of this group, aged 47, has not had the flu jab and currently would not accept as he says it is not compatible with religious beliefs, because he understood that the nasal spray is made using bovine derivatives. If he was to be considered vulnerable in the future he might reconsider if no other options were offered.



One man in his 50s has had three COVID-19 vaccines and boosters and he has the flu jab. He would always prefer these on separate days because it makes his arm sore. He has had COVID twice and said the first time he felt bad for a couple of days up to a week, but the second time he had been vaccinated and said he felt better much quicker. He said his family all reported the same opinion.



The 20-year-old would rather have his jabs on different days because he is in his final year at university. One of the 18-year-olds would rather be vaccinated on different days.



The group discussed how people were still contacting COVID-19 after getting vaccinated, which suggested to them that no one can really know how well the vaccines are working.

Health concerns

Members of this group expressed a range of concerns and observations about issues related to COVID-19, vaccines and access to healthcare, including:



Peers, family and friends, including those in other countries, struggling with their mental health and the fear that there will be more pandemics. There was concern about anxiety, depression, diabetes and obesity.



The additional strain of the cost-of-living crisis on mental health, which the group felt was potentially a bigger problem than the COVID-19 pandemic. Effects were already being seen on friends' and families' mental health. There was concern that people would not be able to afford heating and lighting in their homes if there were more lockdowns.

The group expressed concern about access to NHS services, particularly primary care/GP practices:

- One member perceived that doctors are still refusing to see patients face to face and making new rules. He feels that access to services has changed permanently.

- Another felt that the government is doing everything it can to push private healthcare – that being unable to see a GP was designed to push the public towards considering private healthcare and using private health insurance.
- The group then discussed how even if they were able to get through to their local GP practice and secure an in-person appointment, they were expected to see a nurse practitioner or physician associate rather than a GP.
- One 19-year-old group member said he could never get an appointment and gives up trying.
- Members in their 40s and 50s agreed they had all struggled to make appointments for relatives.

Community leadership

All group members apart from one felt that it was wrong for community leaders such as local councillors and imams to encourage communities to have COVID-19 vaccines. The 81-year-old was happy that the imams had been asked to offer their support and to have the vaccine offered at the mosques. The rest of the group said they felt “forced” to have the vaccine and that imams are not qualified to encourage people to have a vaccine that they cannot be sure is safe.

Pakistani women

Would you be happy to receive both COVID -19 and flu vaccination at the same appointment or would you prefer to have them on separate days?

No, I want them on separate days, one for COVID jab and one for flu. I feel uneasy to have both jabs on same day because I feel that it might be dangerous.

I will do what my doctor advises me and if he advises me to have it on the same day, I will.

No, I will not have any more jabs. I do not believe it will do me any good.

I will have the COVID jab and the flu jab at the same time but will ask the doctor first. My fears are future pregnancies.

I had a bad reaction to the first two jabs, and I will not have them, full stop.

I have had all the COVID jabs and I have flu jabs each year, and I will have the jabs this year, same day is OK.

Do you currently take or plan to take, the yearly flu vaccination?

4/6 said yes

2/6 said no

I do not think they will do my body any good

I do not think it will make any difference, as you can still get flu

Which health concerns are you most worried about now? Has the pandemic changed these?

- blood pressure
- diabetes care
- weight issues
- mental health

The group agreed that COVID has made them feel scared about things and now they are taking more care of their health. Mental health has taken a toll through loved ones and friends dying alongside news reports about how South Asians suffer the most when catching COVID.

Do you know how you can access COVID -19 and flu vaccination services?



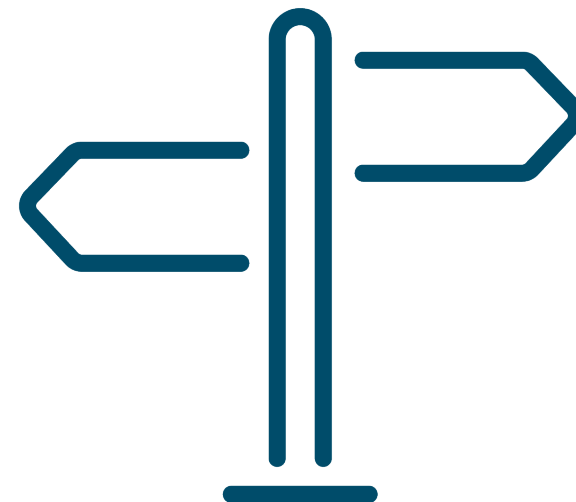
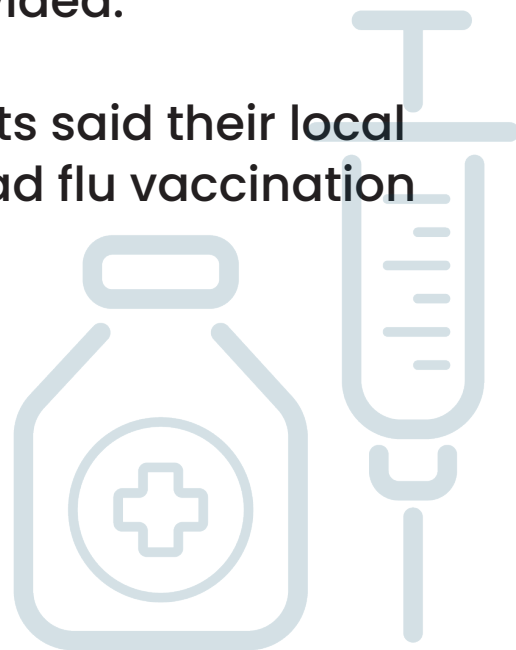
The over-65 participants have been receiving the flu jab every year. They expect their GP surgery will call them when they are due the flu jab.



Two participants mentioned the NHS 111 number but did not know what services it provided.



The participants said their local pharmacies had flu vaccination services etc.



What do you know about COVID-19 and the flu?

The women had little knowledge on this subject.

The popular response was COVID affects your lungs breathing and gives you a cough, loss of smell and taste. On flu, the most common response was that chilly weather gives you flu.

How much confidence do you have in the NHS and other public institutions to protect you and your community from the most severe impacts of COVID -19 and why?

The group gave a mixed response:

- Some said the vaccine had saved people
- some of the group felt that the vaccine is fake, and it does more harm than good
- some reported hearing about side effects of the vaccine and that some people have developed new illnesses since receiving it.

How much confidence do you have in your community to take appropriate actions to protect itself from COVID -19 and why?

Some said they could stay safe by wearing masks, washing hands, getting the vaccine and following guidelines.

Two participants said COVID is no different to a flu and precautions will not stop the virus spreading.

Do you trust the safety and efficacy of COVID-19 and flu vaccines, and why?

This question split the group. Four participants said they felt the COVID vaccine and flu vaccine were safe because their family had taken them and the flu jab has been given to people for long time. But they did not know the science behind it.

Two participants said the vaccines for COVID and flu were useless and did not stop any virus from spreading.

Bangladeshi women

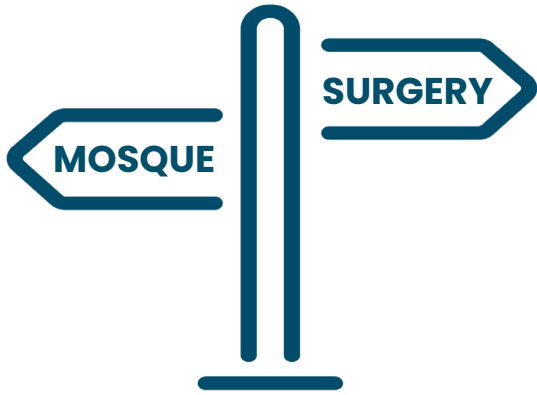


Members of this group were all pro-vaccine and had never heard negative sentiment expressed in their community. They said no one they knew believed in any conspiracy theories around vaccines. Three said they were 100% confident in the NHS. They appreciated leadership from community figureheads such as imams.



- **Three members of this group said they would rather have flu and COVID jabs on different days.**
- **One said she doesn't have vaccines on medical advice after she was very poorly in hospital with COVID-19 at the start of the pandemic.**
- **One member would happily have both vaccines on the same day.**
- **They were not worried about who gives the vaccine provided any volunteer vaccinator were properly trained, including to support people with special needs.**





- One member of this group has received three doses of COVID-19 vaccines – two at her mosque, one at a GP surgery
- One member had received two COVID-19 vaccines, both at her mosque
- Another had received two doses – one at her mosque, one at a surgery
- The fourth had received one dose at a surgery, one at a clinic.

The group expressed confusion over the effects of the vaccine, having witnessed members of their community feeling very ill after receiving it. There was a perception that the boosters must have been stronger than the first dose.

Side-effects mentioned include dizziness, headaches and effects on breathing.

All the women said they had noticed changes to their monthly cycle after their second COVID-19 vaccination.



Bangladeshi men

One member of this group said he was initially unsure that COVID-19 was a real issue, but as soon as his imam became involved in encouraging people to get vaccinated, he understood the need to protect the wider community. Another had doubted COVID was real but believed his mosque.

The whole group thought that local community leaders and imams getting involved was a great idea. They felt that it offered reassurance, and a push to those who needed it to get vaccinated.

The group had seen disinformation circulating but had ignored it.

Would you be happy to receive both COVID-19 and the flu jab at the same appointment or would you prefer to have them on separate days?

- **One member aged 56 who receives the flu vaccine said he would be happy to have it alongside a COVID-19 booster.**
- **One, 74, said he would have any jab offered.**
- **One in his 80s would consider having both together if there were no side effects.**
- **Another member in his 50s has them both together while two others aged over 60 said they were happy to do so.**
- **One member said nasal sprays were not in line with religious beliefs so he was worried about options for children.**

Where vaccines were received

- **Two members had one jab at hospital and one at their GP practice**
- **At the local clinic**
- **Three doses at the mosque**
- **One dose at the surgery and one at the mosque**
- **One dose at the community centre one at the mosque and one at his GP surgery**
- **Two doses at mosque**
- **One at hospital and one at the GP surgery**
- **Two doses at a pharmacy and one at a community centre**



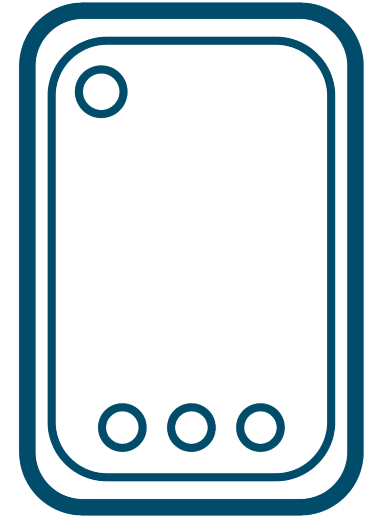
The whole group wanted to know that volunteer vaccinators had received more than a couple of days' training. They all preferred to be vaccinated by a well-trained professional.

Concern and confusion over side-effects and science of vaccines

- One member of this group felt weak and poorly after his COVID-19 vaccine. Another said his fit and well 80-year-old neighbour felt ill after his second booster. He is worried about older people getting the booster and feeling very ill from side effects.
- There was confusion in the group over how people can still get COVID after being vaccinated, although members discussed how a patient's symptoms might have been much worse had they not been vaccinated.
- Some thought the vaccine didn't prevent people from contracting COVID-19, but stopped them from passing it on to others.
- No one in the group understood the science of how vaccines work. Following a group discussion, they understood why people could feel poorly after a vaccine. However, they all felt that a lot of anxiety could have been avoided during the initial vaccination campaign had they been helped to understand some of the science around the vaccines.



- Some of the group asked why so many COVID-19 boosters were necessary.
- The group reported good care from local NHS services but said they struggled to get a GP appointment.
- One reported waiting for two hours on the phone, while another appreciated the call-back system so doesn't have to sit on hold.
- One was aware of virtual services but reported difficulty in accessing them, and felt he had to answer "a million questions" before getting to the heart of his issue.
- Generally, the group felt that the COVID-19 pandemic was over and expressed a good level of trust in the NHS.
- Within their community, they were concerned about an increase in allergies and the emergence of new allergies; mental health issues including anxiety and depression, post-COVID depression and debt problems mounting amid the cost-of-living crisis.



Key insights and recommendations


One theme that emerged repeatedly in our focus groups was confusion over exactly how vaccines work and how they can be effective in combating the spread and symptoms of viruses such as flu and COVID-19, plus the side effects of vaccines. This includes:

- Confusion about why people feel ill after receiving a flu or COVID-19 vaccine
- A sense that receiving vaccines would not make a difference, or prevent people from contracting a virus or prevent the viruses from spreading
- Limited knowledge of the viruses themselves, including symptoms and how they are transmitted
- Concern about the effects of vaccines – both in terms of headaches and dizziness in the immediate wake of the vaccine being administered and perceived longer-term effects such as new allergies/illnesses, changes to monthly cycle etc
- A lack of trust that enough research had been done into the effects of vaccines.

It is also worth noting the difference between the responses of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups to the use of community leaders such as imams in the vaccination campaign. This highlights the need to consult closely with members of individual communities, not solely community leaders, about how to best empower them to make informed choices. A fluid engagement process based around co-production would help to minimise resentment from particular communities who may feel that they are being forced into a process they do not trust. Assumptions about the best methods of building trust should be avoided.

Some of our focus groups enjoyed productive conversations which helped members increase their awareness and knowledge, and there was a perception that much of the confusion and misconceptions outlined above could have been avoided had better information been provided earlier in the process.

Easy-to-understand, accessible yet robust information about the science behind vaccines and the spread of viruses (including how and why it is possible to feel ill after receiving a vaccine, and why a vaccine can be beneficial even if someone does subsequently contract a virus) should be made available in suitable formats, and communities empowered and trusted to make their own informed choices based on this. This should form the basis of an ongoing dialogue as our understanding grows of the evolution of viruses such as COVID-19 and the effects of vaccines.



Healthwatch Bradford and District
Cardigan House
Ferncliffe Road
Bingley
BD16 2TA

www.healthwatchbradford.co.uk

t: 0300 5610 987

e: info@healthwatchbradford.co.uk

 @HealthwatchBfd

 [Facebook.com/HealthwatchBradford](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchBradford)

 @healthwatchbradforddistrict