

Britain must buy Covid drug to protect vulnerable, plead experts

Kat Lay Health Editor

Britain must procure stocks of a drug that can bolster vulnerable people's protection against the coronavirus as soon as possible, experts have urged in a letter to *The Times*.

Evusheld, made by AstraZeneca, was licensed by the UK regulator the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency in March. It contains two antibodies that, when given in jabs every six months, work as a prophylactic against infection by the virus and

severe disease. Some people with immune system problems, such as blood cancer or organ transplant patients, do not get sufficient protection from vaccination and many continue to shield.

Campaigners believe that offering Evusheld to those people could allow them to resume normal life. The calls come as Covid-19 cases continue to rise across the UK. One person in 30 in England was infected in the week ending June 25.

Evusheld is being used in countries including the United States and Israel

but the government has yet to ask AstraZeneca for supplies. In a letter published in *The Times* today, Gemma Peters, chief executive of Blood Cancer UK, and Lord Mendelsohn, co-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on vulnerable groups to pandemics, say that this represents a failure of a promise at the start of the pandemic that the government would "do everything in its power to protect the vulnerable". They write: "Immunocompromised people are still dying from Covid at much higher rates than the rest of the

population: they cannot afford to wait, and deserve better."

Trials showed that Evusheld could reduce the risk of people developing or becoming seriously ill from Covid-19, cutting the risk of symptomatic disease by 77 per cent. UK health officials are believed to want more data on its efficacy against Omicron as the trials were conducted before the variant emerged.

However, campaigners say that the drug is likely to remain effective. Peters said: "Around 100 people with blood cancer are dying of Covid a month in

England and Wales, and with the infection rate extremely high at the moment, it is vital they are given every possible protection." A spokesman for AstraZeneca said: "We hope to supply the UK once the government confirms that it intends to procure Evusheld."

A spokeswoman for the Department of Health and Social Care spokeswoman said: "We have been conducting an assessment of Evusheld ... and ministers are considering the advice which has been presented to them."

Letters, page 26



Folk news Allsa and Dasha, British-Ukrainian sisters, mark Kupala Night, a traditional pagan celebration in eastern Slavic cultures, in Greenwich Park, southeast London

Young pupils fall further behind in test results

Nicola Woolcock

Primary school results have worsened, with fewer than three fifths of pupils meeting the expected standard across the "three Rs".

In February Nadhim Zahawi, as education secretary, set a tough new target that 90 per cent of children should reach the required level in reading, writing and maths in tests taken at the end of primary school.

New figures show that the proportion of children achieving that standard in their Sats tests slipped from 65 per cent in 2019, the last year the tests were taken, to 59 per cent this year.

Robin Walker, who resigned as schools minister yesterday, said that the results were disappointing but expected because of the pandemic.

Seventy-one per cent of pupils met the expected standard in maths, down from 79 per cent in 2019, while 69 per cent met the expected standard in writing, down from 78 per cent.

Seventy-two per cent met the expected standard in grammar, down from 78 per cent in 2019, and 79 per cent met the expected standard in science, down from 83 per cent.

The score for reading rose by one percentage point to 74 per cent.

Walker said: "We welcome the increase in reading attainment, despite the disruption of Covid, which is a tribute to the hard work and dedication of our teachers, pupils and parents."

Geoff Barton, general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, said: "Huge efforts have gone into addressing the disruptive impact of the pandemic on learning. It is hardly surprising that the percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard in reading, writing and maths is lower than it was before the pandemic. It illustrates the very difficult circumstances affecting schools and pupils over the past two years and it is to their immense credit that, within this overall statistic, reading attainment has actually increased despite the disruption of Covid."

He questioned how the government's 90 per cent target could be reached. "It is clear that this will require substantial investment in schools and the teaching workforce to enable them to deliver specialised support to the children who need extra help," he said. "The government's plans contain no additional resources, so it is hard to see how this can possibly be achieved."

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the National Association of Head Teachers, said: "The government's decision not to invest in plans drawn up by their own 'catch-up tsar' may yet prove a costly decision for the life chances of children hit hardest by the pandemic."

Students are still less satisfied with universities than before pandemic

Nicola Woolcock Education Editor
George Willoughby

Students are less satisfied with their universities than they were before the pandemic, the results of annual research show.

More than a fifth of students are not satisfied with courses and even fewer give a positive rating to the assessment and feedback they receive, according to the National Student Survey.

In total, 76.3 per cent of students were satisfied overall compared with 74.4 per cent in 2021 — far below the previous lowest figure of 80.3 per cent in 2006.

Eighty per cent of students said that they were satisfied with teaching, the same as the last academic year when universities were hit by Covid-19 restrictions. The figure is four percentage points lower than in 2019 and 2020.

The survey found that 79 per cent were positive about learning opportunities and 69 per cent were satisfied

with assessment and feedback, both the same as last year.

Access to libraries was the only area that showed significant improvement compared with 2021's results, with 81 per cent satisfied this year compared with 74 per cent last year.

The Office for Students (OfS) said that universities must do more to improve students' opinions about the quality of courses that continue to lag behind pre-pandemic levels.

It said that the 325,000 responses from across the UK showed significant variation between individual universities and colleges, and subjects.

Eighty-nine per cent of veterinary students were positive about the quality of teaching on their course, compared with 76 per cent of computing students.

Susan Lapworth, interim chief executive of the OfS, said: "This year's graduates bore the brunt of the pandemic, with much of their time at university affected by lockdowns and other

restrictions on student life. This year's results show that there is still more to do if students' views of the quality of their course are to improve to pre-pandemic levels. This should be an immediate priority for many universities and colleges."

Medicine and dentistry students were also significantly below the benchmark when it came to their satisfaction with teaching quality, with 82 per cent reporting that they were happy, down from 87 per cent before the pandemic.

In total, 84 per cent of students said that staff were good at explaining things, the same proportion as the previous year, while 82 per cent found their course intellectually stimulating.

Seventy-six per cent overall were satisfied with the quality of their course, an increase on 75 per cent from the previous year but still far lower than pre-pandemic levels.

University of St Andrews retained its

place as the mainstream university with highest overall satisfaction, with 90 per cent of students saying that they were satisfied. It was also top for teaching approval and learning opportunities.

Students at the Open University were the most satisfied with assessment and feedback.

Just 52 per cent of students at Goldsmiths College in London rated the quality of their course highly.

Lapworth added: "Universities and colleges have — by and large — worked hard to return to in-person teaching and ensure students have access to the facilities they need for successful study."

"It is therefore welcome to see a marked increase in the proportion of students agreeing that the resources universities and colleges offer are up to scratch. But on this, and every, measure there are substantial differences in students' views depending on which subject they study."