News Coronavirus

Oxford vaccine 100% effective

Rhys Blakely Science Correspondent

A large US trial of the Oxford-Astra-Zeneca vaccine has confirmed that it is highly effective at preventing severe Covid-19 and that it works well in older people It was also found to be safe with no

hint of an increased risk of blood clots. More than 32,000 volunteers took part in the trial, mostly in America, but also in Chile and Peru. They received either two standard doses of the jab or

a placebo at a four-week interval. It was 79 per cent effective in preventing symptomatic Covid-19 and, among the trial participants, it was 100 per cent effective against severe

The results would seem to put to rest the idea that the Oxford jab is somehow substantially inferior to other vaccines. "In participants aged 65 years and over. vaccine efficacy was 80 per cent," AstraZeneca said in a statement

Several European countries had restricted the vaccine to younger age groups, However, Professor Ann Falsey of the University of Rochester School of Medicine, one of the trial chiefs, said: "This analysis validates the AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine as a much-needed additional vaccination option, offering confidence that adults of all ages can benefit from protection against the virus

An independent data safety monitoring board looked specifically at whether trial participants experienced blood clots. In particular, they looked at whether there was any hint of the vaccine leading to an increased risk of cerebral venous sinus thrombosis blood clots in the brain's venous sinuses. Reports of this condition led to use of the vaccine being suspended in countries across Europe

The independent panel, which recruited an independent neurologist to assist its investigation, found no evidence of an increased risk.

It is yet to be seen whether the data will ease anxieties. The Oxford jab has been sniped at for months and YouGov polling released vesterday shows how trust has plummeted across Europe.

More than 60 per cent of people in France thought that the vaccine was not safe, up 18 percentage points from February. In Germany it was 55 per cent and in Spain it was 52 per cent. In Britain 77 per cent of adults say it

is safe but confidence has taken a knock: 9 per cent say it is unsafe, up four percentage points from February.

Professor Andrew Pollard, lead in vestigator of the Oxford University trial of the vaccine, said: "These results are great news as they show the remarkable efficacy of the vaccine in a new population and are consistent with the results from Oxford-led trials.

"We can expect strong impact against Covid-19 across all ages and for people of all different backgrounds from widespread use of the vaccine.

Professor Sarah Gilbert, one of the designers of the vaccine, said: "In many different countries and across ag groups the vaccine is providing a high evel of protection against Covid-19 and we hope this will lead to even more widespread use

The Oxford vaccine is cheaper and easier to handle than others but several intries in Europe and in other parts of the world suspended its use last week after reports of blood clots.

The EU medical regulator and the World Health Organisation had already stated that there was no evidence linking the jab to an increased risk of clotting

Among the 20 million people who had received the vaccine across Europe. 25 had developed clots. The rate that vould normally occur among unvaccinated people is higher.

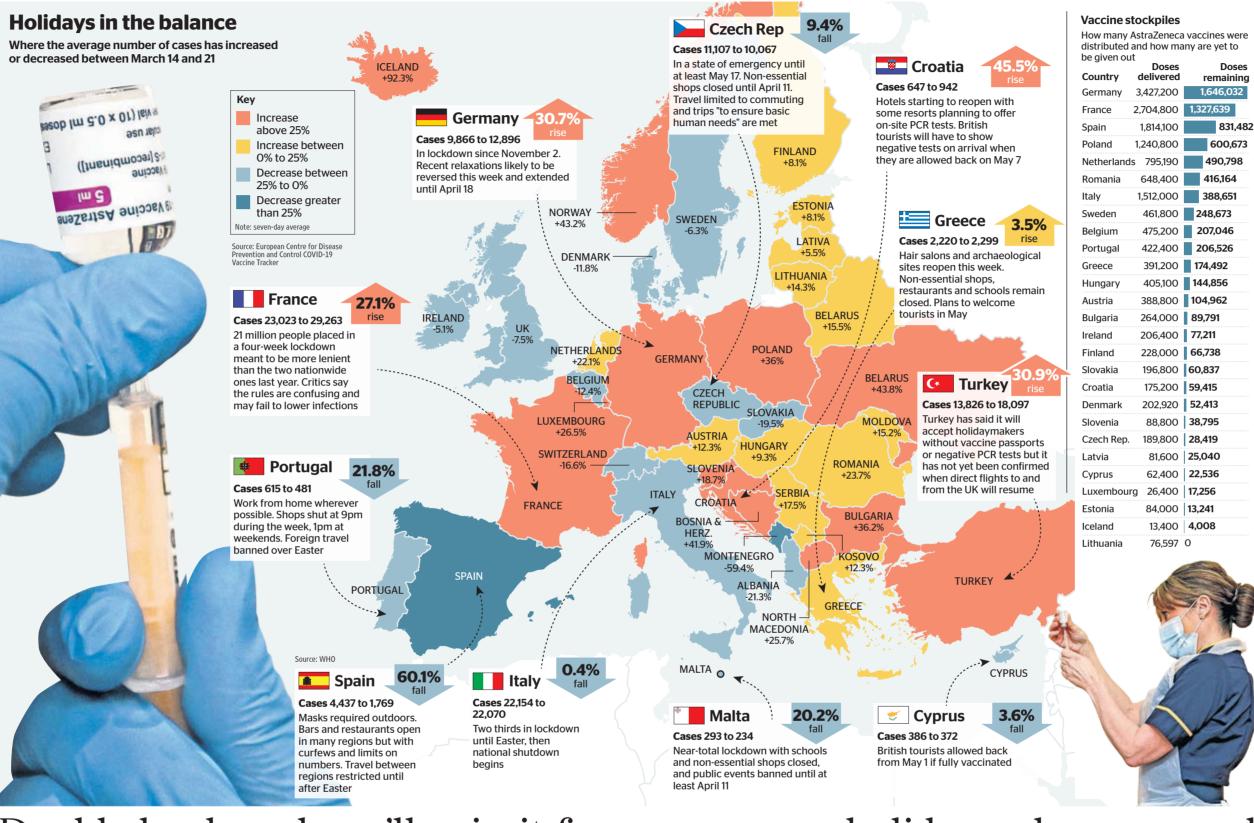
Sir Mene Pangalos, head of research and development for AstraZeneca, said: "I do hope [the trial results] puts to bed any doubts about the vaccine efficacy Overall it's been shown to be highly effective. So I hope that the US study now will continue to give the vaccine some momentum and get it used even further around the world.

He added that the vaccine could win emergency authorisation in the US in the second half of April. If so, the comnany could deliver 30 million doses im mediately and an additional 20 million within the first month

Whether the US would use them is uncertain: the Biden administration has already forecast that it will have enough doses for all adults by the end of May, using supplies from Pfizer, Moderna and Johnson & Johnson, whose vaccines have already been approved there. The White House has faced calls to offer its stocks of the Oxford jab to other countries

Anthony Fauci, the top US infectious disease expert, said of the results: "There are very many countries in Europe and throughout the world who have already authorised this, so the fact that a United States-run study has confirmed the efficacy and the safety of this vaccine I think is an important contribution to global health in general. Vaccine wars, letters, page 28

I've got vaccine envy, Times2



CORONAVIRUS IN BRIEF

Covid impact to | Steroid saved 'last a decade'

Britain is at the start of a "Covid decade" and the social costs of the pandemic will be felt for years, says a report by the British Academy. It said that young people had been disproportionately affected, with poor access to education and training and a poor outlook for jobs Hetan Shah, head of the British Academy, said "Policymakers" must look beyond the immediate health crisis to repair the profound social damage wrought by the pandemic.

Hope's high on a million lives web searches Using the cheap The number of web steroid dexamethasone

searches for "hope to treat coronavirus and "panic attack" both reached record patients may have saved a million lives highs in the past year around the world. Google has said. The NHS England has said. high point for both About 22.000 lives search terms came a have been saved by the month after the first drug in the UK, lockdown began, according to new whereas the word figures. Scientists from "hug" reached a new the University of peak in May as the Oxford working on the public checked the Recovery trial rules on meeting discovered that it cut friends and family the risk of death by a "Party", "festival" and "travel visa" all had third for patients or ventilators, and deaths their lowest search totals on Google over fell by almost a fifth for those on oxygen the past 12 months

Double book and you'll ruin it for

Ben Clatworthy Assistant Travel Editor

British hoteliers fear that holiday makers are "abusing" flexible booking policies to secure breaks at home and abroad for the same week in order to maximise their chance of a holiday.

Domestic accommodation providers fear they will be hit with a "wave of cancellations" if international holidays are given the green light for this summer with guests exploiting cancellation policies designed to offer peace of mind.

Industry sources have told The Times there is mounting concern that holidaymakers are abusing the measures by "spread betting" — booking multiple summer breaks that they know they can cancel at short notice.

"We fear people are abusing [flexible] policies that were introduced to ensure guests were not left out of pocket because of regional lockdowns," one

source said. "It could prove very detrimental to businesses this summer.

Flexible booking policies were introduced last year as a result of the pandemic and the speed at which travel restrictions at home and abroad changed Many hotel groups relaxed cancellation policies, allowing consumers to ge their money back in any eventuality Last night consumer rights groups condemned the practice of holiday makers gaming the system. Rory Boland, the travel editor of Which?, said he was aware of the problem and had even seen examples of the practice being given out as advice. "I think it is irresponsible," he said. "Flexible book-ing policies are fantastic and exactly what we need this summer because we will no doubt continue to see some dis-

ruption. If people abuse them, they'll be

taken away and we'll all be worse for it.'

Boland's comments came as further

Analysis

he prospects for the summer are still looking sunny (Tom Whipple writes). But are they Costa del Sol sunny, or scattered

cloud in Devon sunny Much depends on what happens next in Europe, what happened last year and how we interpret what hat means for us.

Last June countries across Europe were able to open up as the first wave receded. It wasn't perfect: travel corridors collapsed without warning. But they did so after destinations reached levels of infection that most could only dream of in the winter. This time. more of us are immune and

vaccinated — surely it can only be better? Perhaps not. prediction you run a strong risk of When, in autumn, scientists analysed the genomics of the making a fool of yourself. particularly if it is about something four months away. outbreaks driving the second wave Senior figures advising the they found it was, like the first. seeded from abroad. It suggests that government are open about the fact just because a holiday destination that they can run through the has the same level of infection does potential scenarios, they can not mean it has the same risk consider the variables, but in truth This year we are less worried about infection levels. But precisely they have no idea. There could yet be another variant that changes the course of because of the vaccines, and all we have invested in them, we are more the nandemic. Equally in August we worried about which specific virus may look back on this period as a it is that is spreading infection time of needless worry, when w Deciding if it is safe to book a overinterpreted rising cases and scary variants. Hopefully, we might holiday or not is a prediction. What this pandemic has shown, if nothing o sipping sangria on a beach.

against severe Covid in US trial

Doses remaining

everyone, holidaymakers warned

else, is that when you make a

uncertainty was cast over overseas summer holidays this year. Plans under consideration by the government include a traffic light system, under which Britons would only be allowed to travel to "green" countries without self-isolat ing on their return to the UK. Red countries would be banned and ten-day guarantine applied for arrivals from amber destinations. The system would take into account vaccination rates and the prevalence of known variants.

Those in the sector have compared the issue to that of restaurants that have been blighted by no-shows in recent years. However, unlike restaurants, the chance of walk-ins at hotels is very slim

Kate Nicholls, the head of UK Hospitality, the trade body, said: "No-show? and cancellations can mean significant cost incurred by the business and that is clearly going to be a problem at such a precarious time

Europe's new wave is coming, says PM

Henry Zeffman Chief Political Correspondent

A third wave of coronavirus infections sweeping Europe will "wash up on our shores as well", Boris Johnson has warned

The prime minister predicted that the rise in infections in mainland Europe, where vaccination programmes are making slower progress, would spread to the UK.

"We're all facing the same pandemic. we all have the same problems," John son said. "If there is one thing that is worth stressing is that on the content right now you can see sadly there is a third wave under way.

"People in this country should be under no illusions that previous experience has taught us that when a wave hits our friends, it washes up on our shores as well. I suspect that we will feel those effects in due course.

But the prime minister, speaking on a visit to Lancashire, expressed optimism that the UK could mitigate the impact of a third wave. "That's why we're get ting on with our vaccination pr gramme as fast as we can," he said.

Johnson said the country was "on course" to give a vaccine dose to the top nine priority groups, which include all over-50s, by April 15, and said that the government would "bash on" with its reopening road map, which ends with the lifting of remaining restrictions scheduled for no earlier than June 21.

Amid the optimism about vaccina-tions in the UK, Professor Andrew Hayward, of University College London, a member of the Nervtag advi sory group, said it would be a "very bad if the South African variant began to become dominant in Britain. The variant is more resistant to vaccines than other strains of the virus.

"We can see in some areas of Europe it is starting to creep up from very low levels to 10-15-20 per cent [of cases] in some areas, and so that's a worrying trend," he said. "Increasing global travel will increase the spread of these vari ants. That's our main threat in this whole strategy," he said.

Referring to the possibility of future travel Hayward told BBC Radio 4's

Academics back 'bizarre' claim that jabs may kill

Tom Whipple Science Editor

Academics from large British universit ties have put their names to an "extremely irresponsible" document that claims the surge in second wave deaths may have been caused by vaccines.

The document, which seeks to persuade MPs to vote against coronaviru egislation, was also endorsed by Sir Graham Brady, chairman of the 1922 Committee of backbench Tory MPs who said that it was a "helpful review of the evidence" and "grim but important reading". Brady said that the comments referred to other parts of the report, and he had always been a vocal supporter of vaccinations

The report, described as "ridiculous" and "bizarre" by other senior scientists, is produced by Hart, a lockdown- nes are the cause"

How Britain compares

Percentage of population who have received at least one vaccine dose total doses administered in brackets)

Israel	59.8% (9.7m)		
UK		41.2% (3	0.3m) + ₁
UAE		35.2% (7.3	m)
Chile	29.3% (8.5m)		
Bahrain		24.5% (653k	
US		24.3% (124.5	m) People
Serbia		19.2% (2.2m)	vaccinated
Hungary		16.5% (2.1m)	in UK
Finland		13.2% (820k)	First dose 28m
Estonia		12.5% (223k)	Second dose
Morocco		11.6% (6.7m)	2,281,384
Denmark		10.9% (943k)	First dose
Austria		10.7% (1.3m)	daily
Greece		9.4% (1.4m)	Mar 21
France		9.0% (8.6m)	367,006
Italy		8.9% (7.8m)	Second
Spain		8.8% (6.0m)	dose daily Mar 21
Germany		8.6% (10.5m)	51,612
Source: Our World in Data (latest figures available) and gov.uk. Note: Selected countries			

Today: "I suspect what we may end up with is some sort of traffic-light system with some countries that are no-go areas, for example likely to be South Africa and South America: other areas where there will be more severe restric tions, there will be some combination of vaccine certificates testing and maybe quarantine; and maybe there will be some low-risk countries that you can go

Helen Whately, the care minister, cautioned people not to begin making plans to travel abroad later this year in v case. While admitting that "every body feels like it is time for a holiday she told Breakfast on BBC1. "My advice would be to anybody right now just to hold off on booking international travel

She added: "What I would counsel is caution, at the moment, for people to hold off on booking because, as any body can see, we are in a situation where there are rising rates in many countries in Europe and we know that also something that comes with rising rates is increased rates of variants

sceptic group whose members include four academics at Oueen Mary University of London and three from the University of Nottingham.

The document also states that the inoduction of the Pfizer vaccine coin cided with a large number of deaths and this may not have been a coincidence. In one chapter it says: "It would be extremely unscientific and even negligent not to investigate whether the rise in deaths during this period is linked in some way to the vaccine rollout.

Professor Jeremy Brown, from UCL and a member of the government? Joint Committee on Vaccination and nunisation, said this was ridiculous

A spokesman for Hart said that "correlation does not always equal causation and we are not asserting that vacci-