



MANINAGAR SHREE SWAMINARAYAN GADI SANSTHAN
SHREE SWAMINARAYAN MANDIR KINGSBURY

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Press Release

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A Hindu temple first in the UK to open as a Covid vaccination centre.

The newly opened Covid vaccination centre at Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Kingsbury, London, aims to immunise over 1,300 people a day. The temple's state of the art Multifunction Hall has been provided to Harness Care, a group of 20 GP practices, working together to run the vaccination programme serving the Brent community.

NHS England said it fears disinformation could be causing some in the UK's South Asian communities to reject the Covid vaccine. GPs have warned that fake news is likely to be causing some people from the UK's South Asian communities to reject the Covid vaccine. A recent Royal Society of Public Health poll suggested just over half of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people would be happy to have the coronavirus vaccine, compared to nearly 80% of white respondents.

Dr Sachin Patel, GP and Chair of Harness Care commented, "This centre will send an unequivocal message to the Hindu and wider South Asian community that the vaccine is safe and permitted. We're thankful to Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Kingsbury for the leading role they are playing to help us access these communities in a meaningful way. While Shree Swaminarayan Mandir Kingsbury is the first Hindu temple to take this initiative, we certainly don't expect it to be the last."

The temple opened in 2014 as the world's first eco-temple under the mission of "inspiring the community". It has since established itself as a key pillar of the community by hosting regular fundraisers and blood donation sessions. Throughout the pandemic, the temple has continued to hold blood donation sessions at the Multifunction Hall made even more essential during the Coronavirus crisis. It has been hailed by many including London Mayor Sadiq Khan, who has visited several times and Boris Johnson who opened the Multifunction Hall in 2014.

The temple's founder, Acharya Shree Purushottampriyadasji Swamishree Maharaj, instilled the members of the community with the tenet, "society before self". This latest charitable venture has been inspired by his legacy – by receiving vaccinations, individuals play a key part in stopping the spread of the coronavirus and keeping local communities safe from COVID-19.

Temple trustee, Dr Mahesh Varsani and himself an immunologist and researcher in cell and gene therapies, said, "This centre aims to carry out thousands of vaccinations a week, while at the same time address any concerns people may have. Everything we know about the vaccine is that it is safe and effective, and none of its components or manufacturing processes contravenes Hindu doctrine. Some members of the South Asian community may have longstanding concerns that tend to go back generations. But in the same way, this temple, through the messaging of Acharya Swamishree Maharaj starting in 2000, dispelled myths about Hindus donating body organs and blood; we will do the same for these vaccines."

He continued, "This vaccination centre has been inspired by the temple's founder, Acharya Swamishree Maharaj, and strongly encouraged by our current spiritual leader Acharya Shree Jitendriyapriyadasji Swamiji Maharaj, who himself has registered to receive the vaccine in India. Through this, he aims to





dispel false information that the vaccine is somehow forbidden for Hindus and he has been encouraging all people to selflessly take the vaccine as it becomes offered.”

The temple community is pulling together once again in facilitating operational planning and implementation support, along with IT and logistics. Community members have also stepped forward as volunteers for stewarding as well as administering vaccines with the hopes of relieving pressure off NHS staff who have been working tirelessly during the pandemic.

Darshna Patel, Vaccine Programme Manager, GP Pharmacist and active member of the temple community will be administering vaccines at the temple. She echoed the importance of tackling the false information being spread on WhatsApp and other social media platforms, “We are doing this to encourage people to say 'yes' to this vaccine, which is a global triumph for British science, innovation and medicine. And we, as a temple are saying 'no' to the fake and damaging news about it.”

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