



**More than 2.5 million vulnerable people in England will be offered free Vitamin D supplements this winter. The vitamin will be delivered to people who are clinically extremely vulnerable, and care homes.**

About two in five people in the UK are estimated to have a vitamin D deficiency in winter. The NHS says people should consider taking 10 micrograms (400IU) of vitamin D a day.

Low levels of vitamin D, which our bodies produce in response to strong sunlight, may lead to a greater risk of catching COVID-19 or suffering more severe effects of infection, according to some studies.

**Vitamin D has moved a step closer to being used as a potential way to prevent and treat coronavirus after Matt Hancock asked government health advisers to produce new guidelines on its use.**

Vitamin D's effect on immune systems has long been debated among experts. A number of studies have suggested that low vitamin D levels are associated with a higher risk of death from coronavirus, and some believe sufficient levels of it can reduce tissue damage from lung infections.

**Spanish research -**

**Researchers in Spain found that 82% of coronavirus patients out of 216 admitted to hospital had low vitamin D levels. A trial involving 76 patients with Covid-19 in which 50 were given a high dose of calcifediol, an activated form of vitamin D. Half of those who were not given it had to be placed in intensive care, and only one person who received it required ICU admission but was later released with no further complications. Two patients who did not receive calcifediol died.**

All care homes in England will receive enough supplements for their residents, the government says.

People on the clinically extremely vulnerable list will get a letter inviting them to opt in for a supply of Vitamin D tablets to be delivered to their homes.

Deliveries will start in January; they will provide four months' worth of free supplements.

**People who are able to buy a Vitamin D supplement and start taking them now**, ahead of a free delivery, are advised to do so.

Our skin makes Vitamin D when exposed to sunlight, but the elderly and those with dark skin need topping up, particularly as the coronavirus pandemic means many more people than normal have spent time indoors. The groups most at risk are residents in care homes, and people with serious health conditions which mean they have spent extended periods shielding from the virus - a total of 2.7 million people.

"Vitamin D is important for our bone and muscle health," says Dr Alison Tedstone, chief nutritionist at Public Health England. We advise that everyone, particularly the elderly, those who don't get outside and those with dark skin, take a Vitamin D supplement containing 10 micrograms (400IU) every day."

There is evidence that black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people have a higher risk of getting seriously ill with coronavirus. People with dark skin may also not be getting enough Vitamin D even if they spend time outdoors and should consider an all-year-round supplement.

Other sources of Vitamin D are egg yolks, oily fish such as salmon, sardines, herrings and mackerel, red meat and some fortified spreads and breakfast cereals.

Also, research in New Zealand and California have reported significant benefits of Vitamin C and Zinc to reduce the severity of COVID-19.