

KEY RESEARCHERS BEHIND THE COVID-19 VACCINE

In the year since the pandemic started, three vaccines have come online. The first two – developed by Pfizer and Moderna – use a technology called mRNA. Although the vaccines are new, mRNA vaccine technology has been worked with for decades and tested extensively for safety. Immigrants and people of color played significant roles in developing both vaccines.

1 Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett

From small-town North Carolina to national fame

Dr. Kizzmekia Corbett didn't know what a PhD was when she was in high school. Now she has one.

Dr. Corbett is a leader of the team that worked on the Moderna vaccine. At just 34, she is lead researcher for coronavirus vaccine development at the National Institutes of Health.

Dr. Corbett understands the skepticism about the medical establishment and vaccinations among members of the Black community. One of the most notorious episodes in the history of U.S. medical research took place from 1932 to 1972, when the U.S. Public Health Service allowed syphilis to progress in Black men without their knowledge, denying them treatment with penicillin.

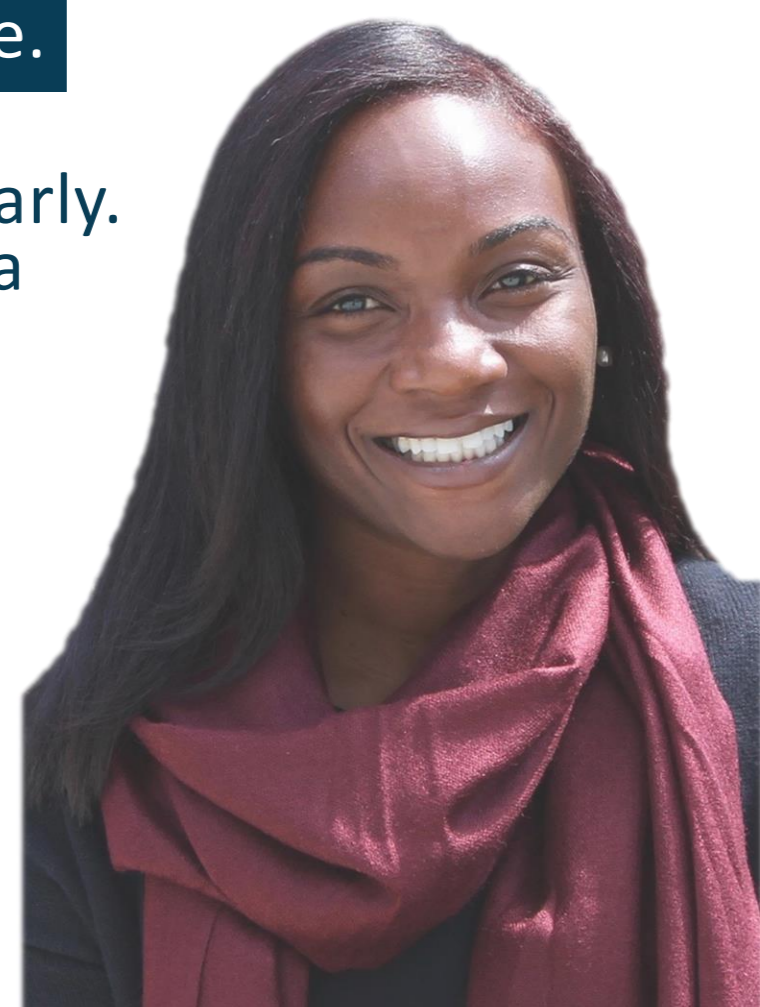
“One of the things that has come out of this moment is that my community does not trust our government,” she told Black Enterprise magazine.

Dr. Corbett wants everyone to know: The COVID-19 vaccine is safe.

She grew up in rural North Carolina and caught the science bug early. A star student in high school, she worked during the summers in a research lab at the University of North Carolina, where she later received her doctorate degree.

At UNC, she was paired with a Black graduate student, whose example inspired her to pursue graduate studies.

“I am Christian. I'm Black. I am Southern, I'm an empath,” she told Black Enterprise. “I'm feisty, sassy, and fashionable.”





2 Dr. Onyema Ogbuagu

From Nigeria to Yale

Dr. Onyema Ogbuagu immigrated to the United States from Nigeria. He is the director of Yale AIDS program HIV clinical trials. He obtained his medical degree from the Yale School of Medicine and he is leads Yale's COVID-19 clinical studies.

Dr. Ogbuagu serves as a principal investigator for various COVID-19 trials, including the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine.

3

Dr. Ugur Sahni & Dr. Ozlem Tureci

Husband-and-wife biotech entrepreneurs

Dr. Ugur Sahni and Dr. Ozlem Tureci founded BioNTech, the biotechnology start-up that partnered with Pfizer to develop the first U.S.-approved COVID-19 vaccine.

Their families both moved from Turkey to Germany, where both began their medical careers. Dr. Sahni became a physician at the University of Cologne, where he earned a doctorate for his work on immunotherapy in tumor cells. Dr. Tureci originally intended to become a nun but pursued medicine instead.

According to the New York Times, the couple returned to work in their lab on the same day they got married. Based in Berlin, BioNTech joined forces with Pfizer in 2018. A year later, the Gates Foundation invested \$55 million to fund its work treating H.I.V. and tuberculosis.



For more resources about the COVID-19 vaccines:
kingcounty.gov/covid/vaccine

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