

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Dr Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD)93/2020

FOR ACTION

Chief Executives, Public Health Agency/Health and Social
Care Board/HSC Trusts/ NIAS

GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board

All General Practitioners and GP Locums (for onward
distribution to practice staff)

OOHs Medical Managers (for onward distribution to staff)

RQIA

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Our Ref: HSS(MD)93/2020

Date: 30 December 2020

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleague

DEPLOYMENT OF THE ASTRAZENECA COVID-19 VACCINE IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND UPDATED JCVI ADVICE ON COVID-19 VACCINES

ACTION REQUIRED

Chief Executives must ensure this information is drawn to the attention of all staff involved in the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

The PHA must ensure this information is cascaded to their staff working on COVID-19 vaccine deployment and the health protection team.

The HSCB must ensure this information is cascaded to all General Practitioners and practice managers for onward distribution to all staff involved in the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

INTRODUCTION

1. You will be aware that on 30 December the COVID-19 vaccine developed by AstraZeneca/Oxford, was granted approval for use following a thorough review carried out by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). In addition to this announcement the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) have also issued further updated advice in relation to the COVID-19 vaccination programme.
2. This letter sets out a broad overview of how the AstraZeneca vaccine will be deployed and highlights some of the updated advice from JCVI, particularly in

relation to the intervals between doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech or AstraZeneca vaccines.

Primary Care based programme

3. Supplies of the AstraZeneca vaccine will be limited initially but are expected to build up rapidly in the months ahead, therefore the initial age cohort that will be offered vaccination via Primary Care Teams will be all those aged 80 years or older as of the 31 March 2021. ie. anyone born on or before the 31 March 1941.
 4. Due to limited supplies, the AstraZeneca vaccine will not be available to order from Movianto NI in the normal way. Instead the DoH COVID-19 Vaccination team, alongside the GP advisors in the HSCB have been working with GP representatives and will shortly be advising all Practices how much vaccine will be available to them for their eligible patients.
 5. The initial vaccinations are expected to begin from w/c 4 January for a small number of Practices while most Practices should be able to begin the vaccination of their eligible patients from w/c 11 January. Before starting, all vaccinators should familiarise themselves with the latest clinical advice in the Green Book chapter on COVID-19 which is available here at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/943663/Greenbook_chapter_14a_v3.pdf#
- GPs must only vaccinate those who are eligible as set out above in para 3. We fully expect to receive additional supplies of vaccine and should be in a position to move rapidly down through the priority groups as recommended by JCVI:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020>
6. Therefore those aged 65 years and over or in an 'at risk' group if they are aged under 65 years of age should not have long to wait before they are offered the vaccine.
 7. While the vaccine has gone through a thorough review by MHRA, colleagues are reminded to report any suspected adverse reactions via the Yellow Card scheme. To make a report or find out more about the Yellow Card COVID-19 reporting site please visit: Coronavirus Yellow Card reporting site. <https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/>
 8. Further information will be issued to GPs to advise them when they can move onto the next priority group.

Updated JCVI advice

9. Following the latest announcement from MHRA the JCVI issued a statement, The JCVI statement is available at: [Priority groups for coronavirus \(COVID-19\) vaccination: advice from the JCVI, 30 December 2020 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020)

10. **JCVI has now recommended that as many people on the JCVI priority list as possible should be offered a first vaccine dose as the initial priority.**
11. JCVI have advised that the second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine may be given between 3 to 12 weeks following the first dose, and that the second dose of the AstraZeneca (Oxford) vaccine may be given between 4 to 12 weeks following the first dose.
12. The clinical risk priority order for deployment of the vaccines remains unchanged and applies to both vaccines. Both are very effective vaccines and comparisons between the vaccine efficacies are unhelpful due to the different methodologies used and lack of data on long term protection and transmission reduction.
13. The four UK Chief Medical Officers agree with JCVI that that prioritising the first doses of vaccine for as many people as possible will deliver the greatest benefit overall in the shortest possible time, will have the greatest impact on reducing mortality and hospitalisations and protecting the Health and Social Care system, and is the right thing to do for public health.
14. Operationally this will mean that second doses of both vaccines will be deprioritised until many more of the priority groups have received a first dose of vaccine.
15. However as some care home residents and staff have already receive their second dose this week with the remainder are scheduled over the next 2 weeks it has been agreed that they should receive their 2nd dose as planned.
16. For those who have received their first vaccination and are due to receive their second dose before Monday 4 January, no further action is required, and these appointments should continue as planned.
17. For those scheduled to receive their first vaccination from the 31 December, an appointment to receive the second dose should be scheduled at 10 weeks.
18. For those who have received their first dose and are scheduled to receive their second after 4 January, the second dose appointment should be rescheduled where possible, but with discretion exercised based on individual circumstances.

Updated advice for pregnant women and women who are breast feeding

19. The JCVI advice in relation to pregnant women has been updated and states:

There is no known risk associated with giving non-live vaccines during pregnancy. These vaccines cannot replicate, so they cannot cause infection in either the woman or the unborn child.

Although the available data do not indicate any safety concern or harm to pregnancy, there is insufficient evidence to recommend routine use of COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy.

JCVI advises that, for women who are offered vaccination with the Pfizer-BioNTech or AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines, vaccination in pregnancy should be considered where the risk of exposure to Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV2) infection is high and cannot be avoided, or where the woman has underlying conditions that put them at very high risk of serious complications of COVID-19. In these circumstances, clinicians should discuss the risks and benefits of vaccination with the woman, who should be told about the absence of safety data for the vaccine in pregnant women.

JCVI does not advise routine pregnancy testing before receipt of a COVID-19 vaccine. Those who are trying to become pregnant do not need to avoid pregnancy after vaccination.

20. In relation to breastfeeding the JCVI advice now states:

There is no known risk associated with giving non-live vaccines whilst breastfeeding. JCVI advises that breastfeeding women may be offered vaccination with the Pfizer-BioNTech or AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccines. The developmental and health benefits of breastfeeding should be considered along with the woman's clinical need for immunisation against COVID-19, and the woman should be informed about the absence of safety data for the vaccine in breastfeeding women.

21. Updated leaflets to reflect the changes above will be developed and distributed as quickly as possible by the PHA.

22. Once again we would like to thank all colleagues who have been involved in the roll out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme for their exceptional commitment to ensuring a rapid and safe deployment of the vaccines across Northern Ireland.

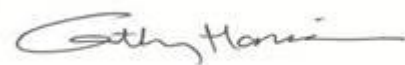
Yours sincerely



Dr Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Professor Charlotte McArdle
Chief Nursing Officer



Mrs Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

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Trade Union Side

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This letter is available on the Department of Health website at
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>
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