



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Nadhim Zahawi MP
Minister for Business and Industry
Minister for COVID Vaccine
Deployment

Department for Business, Energy &
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08 February 2021

Dear Juliet Lyon,

Thank you for your letter to the Secretary of State, on behalf of the Independent Advisory Panel on Deaths regarding the prioritisation of closed custodial institutions, the people detained within them and the staff charged with their care. As Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment, I have been asked to reply.

Vaccines are being distributed fairly across the UK to ensure the most vulnerable are immunised first. The NHS, government and armed forces are doing everything we can to vaccinate those most at risk as quickly as possible and have so far vaccinated more than 9.3 million people. To help reach the most vulnerable people in our society, we now have 2,000 local vaccination sites which deliver vaccines to people who are unable to reach vulnerable groups.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) are the independent experts who advise Government on which vaccines the United Kingdom should use and provide advice on prioritisation at a population level. The Committee in their advice has stated that Phase 1 roll out of a vaccine will have the prevention of mortality at the forefront of its objectives, as well as to support the NHS and Social Care System. For the first phase, JCVI have advised that the vaccine be given to care home residents and staff, as well as frontline health and social care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors. Included in this are those with underlying health conditions, which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality.

The Department has worked with our partners across the Secure and Detained estate to expand the vaccination programme to deliver to the top priority cohorts as defined by the JCVI. The authorisation of Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine has made vaccination in a range of settings much more straightforward, as its storage and handling considerations are much less complex than the Pfizer vaccine. As a result of this, and due to the continued work the vaccination programme has done with the Health & Justice Commissioning Team at NHS England as well as with regional commissioning teams to engage local detained settings, prisoners in England began being offered COVID-19 vaccines from 29 January.

I understand your concerns in relation to risk of community transmission, mitigating health inequalities as well as supporting and recognising frontline staff. Given the current epidemiological situation in the UK, all evidence indicates that the best option for preventing mortality in the initial

phase of the programme is to directly protect persons most at risk. I can assure you, that both prisoners and frontline staff who are eligible for a vaccine, based on JCVI prioritisation, will have access to a vaccine soon as possible. Individuals with specific underlying health conditions as well as individuals who are clinically extremely vulnerable will be prioritised for a vaccine regardless of settings.

There is currently limited evidence to support the use of Covid -19 vaccines to interrupt transmission during outbreaks. Though Pfizer and AstraZeneca vaccines provide protection to a vaccinated person from serious disease, we do not yet know if they prevent someone from passing on the virus to others. Neither do we know what impact the vaccines will have on transmission. We are only likely to know the impact of COVID-19 vaccine on transmission few months down the line. Vaccine efficacy and any potential impacts on transmission will be monitored by Public Health England. Data will be considered at the earliest opportunity to facilitate discussions on prioritisation after the first phase of the programme.

Prioritisation decisions for the next phase of delivery are subject to the surveillance and monitoring of data and information from phase one, as well as further input from independent scientific experts such as the JCVI. Phase two of the roll out may include further reduction in hospitalisation and targeted vaccination of those at high risk of exposure and/or those delivering key public services. We are closely monitoring international COVID-19 responses and will incorporate as much information as possible when reviewing prioritisation decisions for the next delivery phase.

HMG are of the view that COVID-19 vaccination programme's roll-out will align with the overarching priority of further reducing mortality, morbidity and hospitalisations. We believe this approach would protect the NHS and wider society. We are working hard to ensure anyone who is clinically prioritised to receive a vaccine will have access to a vaccine as soon as possible, regardless of settings.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'N. Zahawi', written in a cursive style.

NADHIM ZAHAWI MP
Minister for Business and Industry
Minister for COVID Vaccine Deployment