



Department
of Health &
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*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
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Dear Juliet,

COVID-19 vaccination for closed institutions

Thank you for your letter regarding the vaccination of individuals in closed institutions.

The Joint Committee of Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has now given consideration to vaccinating prison officers and prisoners in detained settings. The JCVI letter and the response from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-the-health-and-social-care-secretary-on-covid-19-vaccination-phase-1-advice>

The JCVI recognises that in closed settings, there may be an increased risk of transmission due to the high concentration of individuals, and there may be difficulty in maintaining social distancing. This may apply to prisons and immigration detention centres, or mental health facilities where individuals may be held under relevant mental health legislation.

Following detailed consideration, the Committee has agreed that it would be difficult to advise additional prioritisation of detainees above the wider population based on the potential increased risk of exposure in a detained setting alone. The overarching priority continues to be to reduce mortality, morbidity and hospitalisation and the JCVI has concluded so far that the way to do this is to base priority for vaccination on age (as the strongest indicator of risk of serious outcomes) and clinical risk factors. The JCVI recognises that many detainees, as you say, will have particular individual risk factors and high uptake of vaccination in each prioritised group should be facilitated and encouraged.

In looking at prison officers the JCVI also concluded that the added risks were primarily around transmission rather than more serious outcomes from COVID-19 linked to their occupation. The JCVI recommended that both prison officers and detainees are strongly encouraged to take up the offer of vaccination when it is their turn. The most vulnerable prison officers and detainees are being vaccinated in Phase 1 with those under 50 who were not for other reasons included in Phase 1 due for vaccination in Phase 2.

The JCVI interim advice is that Phase 2 roll out is age based. While the advice is not yet finalised, the government has accepted JCVI's interim advice for phase 2 in principle. Direct protection to those at higher risk of serious disease and hospitalisation continues to be the main objective for vaccine prioritisation in phase 2 of the vaccination programme. The most effective way to minimise hospitalisations and deaths is to continue to prioritise people by age. This approach will also facilitate rapid vaccine deployment and is the optimal way to protect individuals who are at higher risk of exposure to COVID including those in detained settings.

The JCVI also recommended that any left-over vaccine that cannot be used on detainees should be used for prison officers. This is increasingly unlikely given the numbers of detainees now eligible for the vaccine as the roll out continues. However, in cases where vaccine remains unused following an offer of vaccination to those in detained settings, NHS England has been asked to give consideration to offering those vaccines to prison officers, in order to minimise wastage in delivery of the programme.

We have made a commitment to offer all adults over 50 years of age their first vaccine dose by mid-April and the rest of the adult population by the end of July. Every effort will be made to ensure persons in detained settings are offered a vaccination in line with the offer to persons in the wider community, with appropriate support to promote high vaccine uptake.

Yours ever,

MATT HANCOCK