

	Information about the COVID-19 vaccination programme in Wales
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### **Introduction**

On behalf of our members, the seven Local Health Boards, three NHS Trusts and Health Education and Improvement Wales, the Welsh NHS Confederation has produced this briefing for Members of the Senedd to provide a summary of the key information around the COVID-19 vaccination programme in Wales and the most important messages that members of the public should be aware of. **Links to further information from NHS organisations can be found on Page 9 of the briefing.**

The COVID-19 vaccination programme is the largest scale vaccination campaign in our country's history. Since the first vaccination became available on the 8<sup>th</sup> of December 2020, the NHS in Wales, working with partners, had in 5 weeks vaccinated more people than would normally receive the annual seasonal flu vaccine. To date over 175,000 people have been vaccinated, over 5.1% of the Welsh population. This is a remarkable achievement and should be acknowledged due to the significant work of the NHS workforce.

Our health service has never mobilised an immunisation programme on this scale – it will be unique in many of our lifetimes – and during the most difficult time in the NHS's history. For over 10 months staff across the system, in GP practices, intensive care units, ambulance services, mental health support services and social care services, have been working to meet the needs of the people of Wales in an increasingly difficult and stressful environment. Recently staff have been working hard to cope with rising admissions as a result of community transmission of the new variant, with the NHS currently operating at nearly 150% of normal critical care capacity and more than one third of beds in hospital occupied by COVID-19 patients. NHS Wales has built an infrastructure to deliver mass vaccination programme from scratch and that process is ongoing.

The impact of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines will offer individual protection as well as greater protection for our loved ones, communities and reducing the demand on the NHS and social care. We understand that people across Wales are apprehensive and want to get the vaccine as soon as possible so that they can move further towards a return to more normal day-to-day life.

The message from NHS leaders is clear, nobody will be left behind and every adult who wants the vaccine will receive it. We all hope the vaccine will lead to a better and brighter 2021.



**Key points to consider:**

- The COVID-19 vaccination programme is the largest scale vaccination campaign in our country's history.
- People who are most at risk of developing serious illness or dying from coronavirus will get the vaccine first.
- When we look at the pace of vaccination, Wales' rate is well above those of other European countries.
- Every day, we are vaccinating more and more people in Wales. The latest figures show that over 175,000 people have had their first dose of the vaccine.
- Every week, our vaccination programme speeds up as more venues open and more vaccines are available for the healthcare staff administering the vaccines.
- Vaccinations will be provided in a range of different sites, including mass vaccination centres, primary care surgeries, mobile units, care homes and residential settings.
- We have very low wastage rates in Wales – around 1% of vaccines have not been used.
- Every Health Board and Local Authority have sent a letter out to all people in Wales outlining when they will likely be invited to take the vaccine and where they will need to go to receive it.
- The NHS will contact people and invite them for a vaccine when they are due their vaccination via phone, post or text when it is their turn. People should not contact their GP, Health Board, hospital or Local Authority about an appointment.
- There has been an increase in NHS scams. People will be invited to have the vaccine through official NHS systems, and the NHS will never ask for money or bank details. Please share this important message.
- The NHS is in a precarious position and if cases rise our services could be severely affected once again. As the vaccine is rolled out, we all need to follow the safety rules and keep ourselves and our families safe; meet as few people as possible, wash our hands regularly, wear a face covering and keep our distance from others.
- The roll out of the vaccine is a priority which will not only protect the public, but it will also ease the pressure on a stretched and exhausted workforce.

## **COVID-19 Vaccination Update**

### **The vaccinations available**

There are currently two COVID-19 vaccines being used in Wales, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine and the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. This will be shortly followed by a third vaccine in the spring, known as the Moderna vaccine. All three vaccines require two doses.

There are more vaccines which are in development and those are expected to be available later in the year. The more vaccines which are available for use, the easier and faster it will be to make sure everybody in Wales will be offered a vaccine as soon as possible.

The regular and sustainable supply of vaccines, as well as the continued availability of the workforce to administer the vaccine, will be a key factor in the pace of the roll-out across Wales, like the rest of the UK. Workforce expansion plans and work with the UK Government on supply continues at pace. Health staff are essential for the effective delivery. During the pandemic we have on occasion seen over 10,000 NHS staff off work due to COVID-19. The maintenance of essential care has been an enormous challenge and delivering a vaccination programme at this pace and scale is truly unprecedented.

### **Vaccination roll-out across Wales**

A huge amount of work has gone into planning the massive effort needed to offer and provide everyone eligible with a COVID-19 vaccine. Over recent weeks we have been able to see the impact of a greater supply of COVID-19 vaccines. This has had a really positive impact on the rate of vaccinations. Latest data shows that over 175,000 people have now received their first dose of the vaccine in Wales.

The number of vaccines being administered across Wales has significantly increased since the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine became available. Unlike the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine can be stored at normal fridge temperatures which offers greater flexibility in relation to the venues it can be administered, it is much easier to transport and the primary care sector, including community pharmacies, can administer the vaccine. Double the number of doses of the Oxford-AstraZeneca has been supplied this week compared to the previous two weeks, which allows for more people to receive the vaccine.

### **Priority Groups**

An agreed UK approach is being taken to prioritisation for the COVID-19 vaccine based on the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisations (JCVI). All four Governments in the UK have accepted their recommendations and the NHS in Wales is following the guidance. The JCVI's priority categories have not changed with the introduction of the AstraZeneca vaccine.

The people who are most at risk of developing serious illness or dying from coronavirus will get the vaccine first. The advice from the JCVI is that the focus for the first phase

should be on the most vulnerable, with a maintained focus on preventing deaths and protecting our NHS to enable it to continue to deliver the essential service it provides.

1	Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers
2	All those 80 years of age and over Frontline health and social care workers
3	All those 75 years of age and over
4	All those 70 years of age and over Clinically extremely vulnerable individuals*
5	All those 65 years of age and over
6	All individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality***
7	All those 60 years of age and over
8	All those 55 years of age and over
9	All those 50 years of age and over
*	* Clinically extremely vulnerable individuals are described here. This advice on vaccination does not include all pregnant women or those under the age of 16 years (see above)
**	** The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine is authorised in those aged 16 years and over. The AstraZeneca vaccine is only authorised for use in those aged 18 years of age and over
***	*** This also includes those who are in receipt of a carer's allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill.

### When will people be invited for the COVID-19 vaccine

The Welsh Government published their vaccination strategy on the [11<sup>th</sup> January](#). The strategy sets out three main ambitions:

- **By mid-February** – all care home residents and staff; frontline health and social care staff; everyone over 70 and everyone who is clinically extremely vulnerable will have been offered vaccination.
- **By the Spring** – vaccination will have been offered to all the other phase one priority groups. This is everyone over 50 and everyone who is at-risk because they have an underlying health condition.
- **By the autumn** – vaccination will have been offered to all other eligible adults in Wales, in line with any guidance issued by the JCVI.

More than 1.5 million people in Wales will get the vaccine in the first stage of rollout (1-9 above) – but it will take time to protect everyone. The NHS in Wales is ensuring that all necessary resources are made available and staff trained up to deliver the

vaccine so that these ambitious targets are met. The NHS in Wales understands people will be apprehensive and want to get the vaccine as soon as possible.

For the NHS to deliver against these milestones there are factors which are not entirely in our control. The recent events with both the Pfizer-BioNTech and Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines illustrate just how volatile the delivery and supply situation, as manufacturing plants scale up production. There is a worldwide demand and we have already seen that due to stringent safety checks that some batches have been rejected.

### **Vaccination appointment**

The NHS has sent a letter out to all people in Wales outlining when they will likely be invited to take the vaccine and where they will need to go to receive it. The NHS will contact people and invite them for a vaccine when they are due their vaccination. People do not need to apply for an appointment and the message is that people should not contact their GP, Health Board, hospital or Local Authority about an appointment to ensure that staff can focus on their important work.

We would encourage any person not registered with a GP to register. However, we would expect those in the priority groups, as identified by the JCVI, and who will receive a COVID-19 vaccine in the first phase, will be known to the health services.

All vaccinations in Wales are recorded directly into the Welsh Immunisation System (WIS), an integrated clinical information system developed by the NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS). The System makes it easy to rapidly call the people in the highest priority groups to mass centres, send them text reminders, and make sure that they are called back again for their second dose.

Once a COVID-19 vaccine has been provided, a credit card sized NHS Wales immunisation card will be provided. This will help remind people about their second dose and will also provide information about how to report any possible side effects.

It is up to individuals whether they choose to have the vaccination or not. People will receive information about the jab to help them make up their minds if they have any concerns.

### **Where are vaccines administered**

Vaccinations will be provided in a range of different sites, including mass vaccination centres, primary care surgeries, community pharmacies mobile units, care homes and residential settings and other venues depending on arrangements in your local area.

We originally started with 7 vaccination centres – 1 in each Health Board area, and by the end of January this will grow to 45. A combination of mass centres and smaller satellite centres contributes to the effort to reach every part of the population.

The Mass Vaccination Centres (MVCs) are crucial in handling the characteristics of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine. Health Boards across Wales are actively considering more Centres. Health Boards have planned their vaccination centres to flex their

opening times based on vaccine supply. The Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine has also been used in care homes and there are mechanisms being put in place for primary care use.

The primary care community have a pivotal role to play in the vaccine roll out. Primary care services are key to ensure that older and vulnerable people receive the vaccination in a convenient and safe space for their needs. A mechanism has been put in place to enable all primary care contractors e.g. General Practice, Community Pharmacy, Dentistry and Optometry, to play a key role in vaccine deployment. GP practices and pharmacies, in particular, are experts at running immunisation programmes quickly and efficiently and have the existing infrastructure to do so.

By the end of January, the number of GP surgeries administering the vaccine will increase from 110 to 250 and last week we saw the first pharmacy begin to deploy the vaccine, with more becoming involved in the weeks ahead. The first community pharmacy vaccine pilot in Wales started in a pharmacy in North West Wales on Friday 14 January using the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine.

Community Vaccination Centres (CVCs) are also being introduced. CVCs bring together a range of primary care practitioners, including dentists and optometrists, offering a solution within local communities but with the capacity for greater scale than GP practices alone. This will coincide with an increasing rate of supply from manufacturers.

Mobile units are now also in place across Wales and have been essential in delivering vaccinations to care homes. This currently stands at 14 delivered by our community nurses.

### **Second vaccine**

On 31 December we were able to double the number of individuals who can be vaccinated in the first three months as a result of the change in position by the Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) and the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The JCVI recommended that as many people on the JCVI priority list as possible should sequentially be offered a first vaccine dose as the initial priority. Based on JCVI's expert advice, the four UK Chief Medical Officer's (CMOs) published joint clinical advice that delivery plans should prioritise delivering first vaccine doses to as many people on the JCVI Phase 1 priority list in the shortest possible timeframe. The CMOs agreed that at this stage of the pandemic prioritising the first doses of vaccine for as many people as possible will protect the greatest number of at-risk people overall in the shortest possible time and will have the greatest impact on reducing mortality, severe disease and hospitalisations and in protecting the NHS and equivalent health services. Operationally this will mean that second doses of both vaccines will be administered towards the end of the recommended vaccine dosing schedule of 12 weeks.

### **Vaccination waste**

It is essential that we vaccinated as many people as possible, as quickly as possible, and as safely as possible while wastage is kept to an absolute minimum. As with any vaccination programme there is likely to be some wastage, this could be due to disorders with a vial, human error or issues with transportation of the vaccines for example. However, to date NHS Wales is currently running our COVID-19 vaccination programme with less than 1% wastage, which means we are maximising the use and also the impact of these lifesaving vaccines as much as possible.

To date there have been very few cancellations or no-shows for the vaccine appointment. If, for any reason, people cannot attend their appointment, Health Boards ask them to let them know via the contact details provided in their invitation. All Health Boards have arrangements in place to give others, in the priority groups, the vaccine in the event of no-shows or cancellations. This has ensured the number of doses unable to be used has been very low and below the anticipated levels.

### **Workforce**

Currently, the NHS in Wales is still dealing with many COVID-19 patients in our hospitals. 40% of patients in hospital are recovering from COVID-19, with the NHS operating at nearly 150% of normal critical care capacity and staff sickness rates at around 10% as a result of COVID-19. The roll out of the vaccine is a priority which will not only protect the public, but it will also ease the pressure on a stretched and exhausted workforce.

Current lockdown restrictions, if successful, will give the NHS breathing space in which to administer the first dose of the vaccines to as many people as possible. However, if pressure grows and infection rates rise, our resources will be further stretched as GP's and hospitals will be required to deal with more people who need clinical help. Training is being provided to increase the number of people who can administer a COVID-19 vaccine.

Staffing models have been developed in great detail with a multidisciplinary approach which respects the guidance on social distancing, PPE and the complexity of handling the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine. The teams in the MVCs are a collection of experienced immunisers, those with updated training and registered health care professionals who have taken the training required to immunise using the vaccine. The support of the military is also in place across Wales and there is the possibility that this could be expanded over the coming weeks.

Due to the significant interest in supporting Health Boards with their local delivery programmes and the use of premises, arrangements are in place with St John Ambulance Cymru and British Red Cross and further discussions are ongoing. Health Boards are also having conversations with their Local Authority partners and police. Health Education and Improvement Wales and the WCVA are also assisting centrally.

Since the beginning of the pandemic there has been a key role for retired staff and others with the expertise and experience to help support the response to the pandemic and specifically with the vaccination roll out. There are arrangements in place and

protocols for people to be able to volunteer at local level. The rate that volunteers are being called upon will greatly increase as the rate of delivery of vaccine increase.

## **Communication**

### **Public Communication**

Every Health Board and Local Authority has sent a joint letter about its Covid-19 vaccination plans to every household in Wales.

Each Health Board has set up a dedicated webpage for COVID-19 vaccinations where people can find out more information about booking their vaccine and when they should be able to do so. Public Health Wales have also published a [frequently asked questions](#) document which gives short and concise answers to any concerns which people might have. All Health Boards in Wales are engaging with Local Authorities, MSs, MPs and local stakeholders regularly. We all have a role to play in keeping the community aware of how, where and when the vaccination programme is going to happen and to manage expectations of the challenges we are facing.

### **Vaccination scams**

We have been made aware of a number of scams related to the COVID-19 vaccination. As highlighted, people will be invited to have the vaccine through official NHS systems, and the NHS will never ask for money or bank details. We would be grateful for any support in sharing this important message, particularly to our most vulnerable residents.

## **Key Messages to the public around COVID-19**

### **Keep Wales Safe**

As the vaccine is rolled out, we all need to follow the safety rules and keep ourselves and our families safe. The key messages are that all people need to meet as few people as possible, wash our hands regularly, wear a face covering and keep our distance from others.

The NHS in Wales has been working with partner organisations to promote the most important things which can keep people safe from infection. Public Health Wales NHS Trust and Local Health Boards have been routinely co-ordinating with public bodies, the private sector and voluntary organisations to make sure a consistent message has been given to the public. In effect, this means you are likely to see the same information in the streets as you are in banks, supermarkets and all other businesses which are deemed essential during the lockdown period.

These key messages will help to aid the vaccine roll out. The NHS in Wales has emphasised how much pressure we are under, and the number of patients we are seeing both with Coronavirus and with other significant health issues. It will be important as the vaccine is rolled out to more people, that NHS resources can remain free to deliver the vaccine as quickly as possible. This means we will need some form

of restrictions and for those who have been vaccinated to continue to adhere to the guidance until we have enough people vaccinated and enough evidence to support a sustained drop in the infection rate.

If people take the vaccine as a 'passport to freedom' then we may see infections spike and hospital admissions rise given we do not yet know if the vaccine decreases transmission.

### **COVID-19 testing**

We are encouraging people to obtain a test as soon as possible if they are experiencing any of the symptoms of Coronavirus in order to protect their communities, and to remain self-isolated until their test results are known.

- New continuous cough
- High temperature
- Loss of or change to normal sense of smell or taste.

**Anyone who has symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate until they receive the test results, only leaving the house to get a test. Anyone who tests positive must self-isolate for 10 days.**

### **Further information on vaccination programme across Wales**

#### **Public Health Wales NHS Trust**

- [General FAQs](#)
- [Health care professionals](#)

#### **Health Boards**

- [Aneurin Bevan University Health Board](#)
- [Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board](#)
- [Cardiff and Vale University Health Board](#)
- [Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board](#)
- [Hywel Dda University Health Board](#)
- [Powys Teaching Health Board](#)
- [Swansea Bay University Health Board](#)