

Letter from the Health Board about coronavirus and the vaccine

2020 was a very difficult year for everyone. So many of us have lost family members and close friends to coronavirus and all of us have had our lives turned upside down by the pandemic.

We want to deeply thank you all; for your support to our front line staff and for the efforts you have all taken to help stop the spread of the virus.

Regrettably, the situation across North Wales is very serious at the moment. We have seen a very significant increase in cases of the virus and most of these are the new, very transmissible strain of coronavirus. Our hospitals and community health services are under extreme pressure as a result of this.

We all need to stay home again to stay safe, save lives and to protect our NHS from being overwhelmed.

But there is a glimmer of hope for us all. You will have heard that two new vaccines are now available, with a third available in spring. This is the good news we have been waiting for. It hopefully means we can begin to look forward to a return to normal life.

How the vaccination is being made available

We currently have two types of vaccine available – one made by Pfizer-BioNTech and one developed by Oxford-AstraZeneca, which is being manufactured here in North Wales.

A huge amount of work has gone into planning the massive effort needed to provide everyone eligible with a vaccination. So far we have been limited by the supply of the new vaccines but as more is delivered, the pace will now rapidly increase and more clinics will be set up during January. More than 95 GP practices across North Wales will be running special vaccination clinics this month in addition to vaccination centres at the Rainbow Hospitals and other local centres.

You will be invited to have the vaccine when it's your turn. More than 1.5 million people in Wales will get the vaccine in the first stage of roll out – but it will take time to protect everyone. The people who are at greatest risk of catching coronavirus and developing serious illnesses will get the vaccine first.

You can choose whether to have the vaccine or not and you will be given more information when you receive your appointment. We understand many people have concerns about the vaccine – the web site below provides a lot of detail on the safety of the vaccine and we encourage anyone with concerns to take time to read about the ways in which the vaccine has been tested and approved.

<https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/immunisation-and-vaccines/covid-19-vaccination-information/>

Who will get the vaccine first

The priority list to receive the vaccine has been agreed by the UK's independent Joint

Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and is being followed by all four nations in the UK.

There are two phases:

In the first phase, we will vaccinate according to age and risk of serious illness if someone catches coronavirus.

This priority list is as follows:

1. People living in a care home for older adults and their staff carers
2. All those 80 years of age and older and frontline health and social care workers
3. All those 75 years of age and over
4. All those 70 years of age and over and people who are extremely clinically vulnerable (also known as the “shielding” group)
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

These groups represent around 99% of preventable deaths from coronavirus.

* Underlying health conditions covers a range of illnesses including chronic respiratory disease, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), cystic fibrosis and severe asthma, chronic heart disease (and vascular disease), chronic kidney disease, chronic liver disease, chronic neurological disease including epilepsy, down’s syndrome, severe and profound learning disability, diabetes, solid organ, bone marrow and stem cell transplant recipients, people with specific cancers, immunosuppression due to disease or treatment, asplenia and splenic dysfunction, morbid obesity and severe mental illness.

In the second phase, further recommendations are awaited from JCVI and we hope the rest of the population in North Wales will be vaccinated. The advice from the JCVI is that the focus for this first phase should be on preventing further hospital admissions and vaccinating those people who are at increased clinical risk first.

Getting your vaccination appointment

You will receive an invitation when you are due for your vaccination. It will include details of where to go to receive it.

You don't need to apply for an appointment – we will contact you. Please do not contact your GP or hospital about an appointment as they will not be able to arrange an appointment any quicker.

Everyone will get two doses of the vaccine but you will have a high level of protection after the first dose. You will be called back for your second dose within 12 weeks of the first.

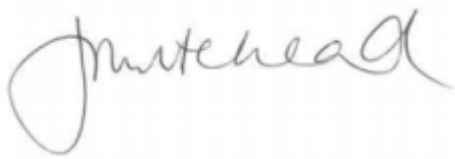
When you have your Covid-19 vaccine, you will get a credit card-sized NHS Wales

immunisation card. This will act as a reminder about your second dose and will also have information about how to report any side effects (side effects are very rare and any vaccine can cause them).

We all hope the vaccine will lead to a better and brighter 2021 and an end to this pandemic, but the roll out will take time and we ask for your continued support and adherence to the necessary safety measures; stay at home, maintain social distancing, wear a face covering where required and regularly wash your hands.

These precautions help stop the spread of the virus, which in turn directly reduces the number of seriously ill people in hospital and gives us more time to deliver the vaccine. Together, through these precautions and the vaccine, we can protect our community.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Whitehead". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'J'.

Jo Whitehead
Chief Executive