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Members of the Scottish Parliament and Scottish
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Dear colleagues

COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME

Following last week's important milestone of reaching one million first dose vaccinations, I am writing to update you on vaccine supply and delivery. Delivering a programme of this scale and complexity at such pace is unprecedented and once again I would like to express my thanks to everyone who is involved in delivering it, along with all the people who have rolled up their sleeves and had the vaccine.

It is clear from attending the COVID-19 Committee on 11 February that you share my appreciation and would wish to join me in thanking those who have made it possible.

As we know, this pandemic continues to provide challenging circumstances. The First Minister and I have been open with you and the public about these challenges. We published the COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Plan in January setting out our key milestones. So far we have exceeded many of these, but their delivery remains contingent, as we have always said, on the supply of vaccines.

Allocation and delivery of supply

I have been keen to publish information about levels of supply allocation and delivery in the interests of openness and transparency and I am pleased to have persuaded the UK Government to agree to that change. We are now in a position to share weekly data about doses allocated and delivered to Scotland alongside our other regular published data about the vaccination programme.

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I am now able to confirm number of doses allocated and delivered to Scotland, as of Monday 15th February:

- Total number of doses allocated to Scotland: 1,618,320
- Total number of doses delivered to Scotland: 1,520,690

This data, together with supporting information, has been published on the Scottish Government website, and will be updated weekly. The difference between the doses allocated and doses delivered reflects the ongoing ordering and delivery of the vaccine from the UK holding centre.

These statistics show that the vaccines are getting quickly from manufacturer to patient, with our statistics now showing that almost 1.4 million people have received their first dose in the period 8 December to 8:30 am Friday 19 February.

The majority of vaccine doses delivered to Scotland that have not yet been administered are with Health Boards for use in appointments scheduled this week. Indeed around 98,000 have received their vaccine since Monday 15 February.

We will retain a small amount of vaccine stock on a rolling basis to mitigate against any dips in projected vaccine supply as we progress through the programme.

Vaccination programme progress update

Scotland continues to follow the JCVI advice on prioritisation, to protect those at highest risk of serious disease or mortality.

As of 8.30 this morning (19 February), 1,386,152 people have received the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccination and 29,015 people have received the second dose. Performance and uptake by group is set out below:

Group 1 & 2

- Completed 5th February, with a small number of vaccinations continuing for people who were not able to take up their appointment at the time.
- We have seen high uptake rates for these groups as follows:
 - 30,670 first dose vaccinations of care homes residents in older adult care homes have now been completed, exceeding the initial target. This is based on our understanding of the estimated population from the TURAS Care Home Safety Huddle Tool as at 11 January. The number of people in care homes can change and any new residents will be vaccinated as a priority.
 - 41,753 care home staff (93% of staff in older adult care homes and 80% of staff in all care homes)
 - 273,063 people aged 80 or over, exceeding estimated population based on the latest mid-2019 population estimates.

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- 287,800 frontline health and social care workers, exceeding the initial target provided by Health Boards.

Group 3 & 4

- 205,981 people aged 75-79 have received their first dose, exceeding the estimated population based on the latest mid-2019 population estimates.
- 261,681 people aged 70-74 (94%) – have received their first dose
- 151,046 people who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (84% of those on the shielding list) have received their first dose – these figures include people vaccinated in other priority groups.

Group 5

- 220,470 people aged 65-69 (74%) have received their first dose.

As I highlighted at the COVID Committee on 11 February, as at 7 February we had received 196,000 fewer vaccine doses than anticipated. This is in total between December and February and was due to a short term reduction in manufacturing capacity that is necessary to allow manufacturers to increase their output.

Additionally, our expectations on demand have been surpassed with the uptake of the vaccine exceeding our planning assumptions of 80% uptake in the deployment plan. However, the lower than expected supply, combined with higher than expected uptake, means that we need to adjust our plans. I have always said that this needs to be a flexible and dynamic delivery model and our constraining factor will always be supply. This continues to be the case.

I am delighted to say that we vaccinated almost 400,000 people in the second week of February. However, from this week we need to reduce the number of vaccinations to around 200,000 a week until supply increases.

As I explained at the COVID committee this week, clinical advice remains that second doses need to be prioritised within the twelve week timeframe in line with the Chief Medical Officer's letter to Health Boards of 12 February. Following prioritisation of second doses, Health Boards are expected to maximise projected stock to continue administering first doses in line with the JCVI priority cohorts.

The next cohort to be vaccinated, cohort 6, is people aged 16-64 years with underlying health conditions and unpaid carers. For both parts of this cohort, there are people we know about and people for whom further work to identify is required. This is a large group of people, which includes those qualifying through the 'modified flu list' and unpaid carers (who have not already been vaccinated due to age or if they are clinically extremely vulnerable).

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We are using the definition for an unpaid carer as set out in the Carers (Scotland) Act 2016. This will capture all unpaid carers set out in the JCVI definition (those who are eligible for a carer's allowance, or those who are the sole or primary carer of an elderly or disabled person who is at increased risk of COVID-19 mortality and therefore clinically vulnerable), but will also cover other carers whom people rely on for day-to-day support. Consequently, our coverage of this group may be higher than the other parts of the UK. We have taken this view to ensure alignment with our legal definition of unpaid carers and in doing so, reduce the risk of caring situations breaking down due to carer illness from COVID-19, placing further pressure on NHS and Social Care services.

To assist with the identification of both parts of this cohort, data is being extracted from GP systems, as occurred for the 2020-21 flu season, to identify people in the COVID-19 'at risk' group.

We already have data for many people who qualify through the 'modified flu list' and for unpaid carers we have a list of those in receipt of certain carer benefits who have not already been vaccinated. Boards will proceed with these two initial groups at the same time: the 'modified flu list' and the unpaid carers in receipt of carer benefits.

I have attached a letter from Dr Steedman, the Deputy Chief Medical Officer, to General Practices that provides further details.

Due to the speed of rollout and large size of the at-risk group, the identification of those in this group is occurring over a number of weeks. This will include asking carers not identified through social security or through GPs to self-identify through an online portal or the national helpline. Carers who have not received an appointment letter do not need to do anything yet. I will write to you separately with the details of this process when it is ready to 'go live'. I expect that to be in early March.

Boards will then include any additional people who qualify through underlying conditions not previously identified in the 'modified flu list' and those unpaid carers who have been identified by GPs or are self-registering as eligible.

Some boards have started to vaccinate cohort 6 and the majority of boards will have started by next week. I will update you soon as possible of any changes that impact upon cohort 6 should, for example, JCVI make any further recommendations regarding this cohort.

As we have shown, we will deliver as quickly as supplies allow, now also ensuring the increased numbers of second doses are delivered within the timeframe advised by the four Chief Medical Officers. In the meantime, vaccine information is available on NHS Inform and, for those not on line, the COVID-19 Vaccination Helpline can be reached on 0800 030 8013. I am pleased that recent reports indicate that average wait time of the Helpline is running at between 2 and 7 seconds.

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Thank you for your continued support in fighting this pandemic. We continue to urge everyone to take up their appointment when they are offered one. The vaccination programme is one of three key ways we are working to beat this virus, along with our expanded testing programme to identify cases and break chains of transmission and the wider restrictions everyone in Scotland must follow. The combination of these measures work give us the greatest chance of a successful exit and I'd be grateful for your continued support in ensuring your constituents remain informed and encouraged to continue their excellent support for the restrictions and guidance necessarily issued.



JEANE FREEMAN

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