

E: Covid19VaccinePolicyMailbox@gov.scot

Date 18 February 2021

Dear Colleague,

Priority 6 “at-risk” COVID-19 Vaccination Cohort Information

Background

Work to ensure that JCVI COVID-19 vaccination priority cohorts are identified and sent invitations has proceeded at an unprecedented pace. There are, however, particular challenges around identifying those in the Priority Group 6 i.e. those adults aged 16 to 64 years in an “at-risk” group

It is not possible to utilise the existing influenza “at-risk” cohorts as, although some overlap occurs, there are some significant differences between the JCVI “at-risk” criteria for the COVID-19 vaccination and the flu vaccination programmes. The main differences are:

In flu “at-risk” cohort but not in COVID-19 “at-risk” cohort

- For COVID-19 increased risk in association with asthma, this only applies to those who have had a hospital admission for asthma or those who require continuous or frequently repeated courses of oral steroids. In contrast to flu vaccine eligibility, patients who are well controlled on asthma inhalers are not eligible in cohort 6 for priority COVID-19 vaccination
- For COVID-19 vaccination, pregnancy is removed as a defined group who should be vaccinated because of pregnancy alone (in contrast to flu vaccination eligibility). It is likely that some pregnant women who qualify through other “at risk” criteria in terms of COVID-19 will be invited for vaccination. Current JCVI advice is that pregnant women can be vaccinated, and although the available data do not indicate any harm to pregnancy, there is insufficient evidence to recommend routine use of COVID-19 vaccines during pregnancy. JCVI has advised that vaccination in pregnancy should be considered where the risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 infection is high and cannot be avoided, or where the woman has underlying conditions that put them at very high risk of serious complications of COVID-19. In these circumstances, clinicians should discuss the risks and benefits of vaccination with the woman, who should be told about the absence of safety data for the vaccine in pregnancy. Women who are pregnant should contact their antenatal services to discuss their risk and benefits from vaccination prior to their vaccination appointment. Communications are also in place to advise pregnant women of the need to contact their antenatal services.
- Children under the age of 16 – these are not included in the COVID-19 vaccination programme in general as there is an absence of safety and efficacy data on the vaccines in children at present.

In Covid-19 “at-risk” cohort but not in flu “at-risk” cohort

- Peripheral Vascular Disease
- A history of Venous Thromboembolic Disease
- Epilepsy
- Severe mental illness i.e. individuals with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, or any mental illness that causes severe functional impairment
- Many of the existing disease areas such as Coronary Heart Disease, Chronic Liver Disease, Renal Disease, and Immunosuppression, have an expanded list of Read codes in the search specifications

Data Extraction from GP Practices

Data is being extracted from GP systems using the Albasoft extraction process, as occurred for the 2020-21 flu season, to identify people in the COVID-19 group 6. Due to the speed of rollout and large size of this at-risk group, the identification of these people will continue over several weeks. It is therefore likely that people in this group will receive letters in a staggered way over this time. This also allows for local Health Board scheduling arrangements to be appropriately managed.

The group 6 extract will identify patients who are fully registered with the Practice and aged 16 years or over on the date of data extraction, and <65 years on 31.3.21, and who fall into one or more of the following groups:

- People with asthma who have required regular or repeated courses of oral prednisolone (3 prescriptions in the last 6 months or 168 tablets in last 6 months if on Chronic Medication Service). Note that in line with JCVI and Green Book advice on this cohort this **does not include patients controlled on inhaled steroids**.
- Asthma patients with a recorded hospital admission because of asthma.
- Other Chronic Respiratory Disease as per Green Book guidance
- Coronary Heart Disease, Peripheral Vascular Disease and Venous Thromboembolic Disease as per Green Book guidance
- Chronic Kidney Disease as per Green Book guidance
- Chronic Liver Disease as per Green Book guidance
- Diabetes i.e. any diabetes, including diet-controlled diabetes
- Immunosuppression (coded or by prescription since 01/07/2020) as per Green Book guidance
- Asplenia or dysfunction of the spleen - this also includes conditions that may lead to splenic dysfunction, such as homozygous sickle cell disease, thalassaemia major and coeliac syndrome
- Neurological Disease (including Downs' Syndrome, severe or profound Learning Disability and Epilepsy) as per Green Book guidance
- Severe Mental Illness i.e. individuals with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder, or any mental illness that causes severe functional impairment
- Morbid Obesity (last recorded BMI>40)
- Adult Carers

Carers

The JCVI group 6 also specifies vaccination for adults who are deemed carers. Please note that 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) and other carers whom people rely on for day-to-day support. This will reduce the risk of caring situations breaking down due to carer illness from COVID-19, placing further pressure on NHS and Social Care services.

Some carers will have been identified through the GP extracts and further individuals will be identified through data records of those in receipt of relevant Social Security Scotland allowances (Carer's Allowance, Young Carer Grant and Child Winter Heating Payment). However, we are aware there will be other people of whom Practices may not be aware of and who are not receiving carers benefits, and therefore cannot be identified in this way.

Work is underway to identify those who may be deemed carers and not identified through records. These people will be invited to self-register for their vaccination as part of group 6 via an online registering registration form or by calling the national contact centre.

Further communications will be sent shortly on this registration process and individuals in this situation should await this information.

Yours faithfully,



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Interim Deputy Chief Medical Officer