

From: Department of Health and Social Care <DoNotReply@dhsc.gov.uk>
Sent: 23 June 2021 09:27
To: Susan Walsh <susan.walsh@immunodeficiencyuk.org>
Subject: Your recent correspondence

Our ref: DE-1331851

Dear Dr Walsh,

Thank you for your correspondence of 20 May about COVID-19. I have been asked to reply.

I was so sorry to read of the challenges your patients have faced.

The Government has now published its roadmap for cautiously easing lockdown restrictions in England, *COVID-19 Response - Spring 2021*, which sets out how it will continue to protect and support UK citizens, whilst beginning to ease restrictions. The roadmap seeks a balance between key social and economic priorities, whilst preserving the health and safety of the country, and reducing the risks of a further lockdown. This document can be found on the Government website at www.gov.uk by searching for the document title. For those with online access, this should provide information relating to the pandemic.

The steps for easing restrictions will be taken at the same time across England in a national approach. At each step, the Government will make an assessment against the following four tests:

- the vaccine deployment programme is continuing successfully;
- evidence is showing that the vaccines are sufficiently effective in reducing hospitalisations and deaths;
- infection rates are not risking a surge in hospitalisations and putting unsustainable pressure on the NHS; and
- the Government's assessment of the risks is not fundamentally changed by new variants of concern.

The Government accepted the recommendations from the independent Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to authorise the COVID-19 vaccines from Pfizer/BioNTech, Oxford/AstraZeneca and Moderna. This follows months of rigorous clinical trials and a thorough analysis of the data by experts at the MHRA, who have concluded that all three vaccines met its strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness.

None of these COVID-19 vaccines include live virus or live attenuated virus and they are all therefore suitable for use in immunocompromised people.

Clinical studies for these vaccines excluded immunocompromised people and no data is therefore available about the vaccines when used at the same time as

immunosuppressant medicines, or about the immune response to the vaccine in those on such medications. However, data is being collected on the use of these vaccines in immunocompromised people via the UK/EU risk management plans.

Evaluation of data for other vaccines is ongoing and will include a robust review of all quality, safety and efficacy data, including in immunocompromised people if they were included in clinical trials.

Information about the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-pfizer-biontech-vaccine-for-covid-19/information-for-healthcare-professionals-on-pfizerbiontech-covid-19-vaccine

The guidance states that:

immunocompromised persons, including individuals receiving immunosuppressant therapy, may have a diminished immune response to the vaccine. No data are available about concomitant use of immunosuppressants.

Information about the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine can be found at:

assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/963838/AZD1222_Information_for_Healthcare_Professionals_-_22-02-2021.pdf

It states that *it is not known whether individuals with impaired immune responsiveness, including individuals receiving immunosuppressant therapy, will elicit the same response as immunocompetent individuals to the vaccine regimen.*

Information about the Moderna vaccine can be found at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-approval-of-covid-19-vaccine-moderna/information-for-healthcare-professionals-on-covid-19-vaccine-moderna

This guidance states that *efficacy, safety and immunogenicity have not been assessed in immunocompromised individuals, including those receiving immunosuppressant therapy. The efficacy of COVID-19 Vaccine Moderna may be less in these individuals.*

People who may be immunosuppressed, for example due to chemotherapy, are considered in the UK Government priority groups, and can be vaccinated when they receive an invitation. The Public Health England Green Book identifies the conditions that are automatically deemed clinically vulnerable. This information can be found at www.gov.uk and by searching for 'green book'.

Recent evidence does suggest that immunosuppressed adults may not respond as well to the COVID-19 vaccine as others. This is why the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has advised that those aged over 16 years old who live with severely immunosuppressed adults should be offered the COVID-19 vaccination as part of priority group 6. This will help to limit the spread of the virus to immunosuppressed adults. The JCVI's advice applies to those living with adults who have weakened immune systems, such as those with blood cancer, HIV, or those on immunosuppressive treatment such as chemotherapy.

The Health Secretary has welcomed this advice and has asked NHS England and Improvement to take it forward, as set out in his letter to the JCVI on 29 March 2021. The letter can be read in full at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/letter-from-the-health-and-social-care-secretary-on-covid-19-vaccination-to-protect-severely-immunosuppressed-adults.

As soon as more evidence becomes available, the JCVI will provide further advice on strategies to protect immunosuppressed individuals and will consider if certain vaccines are preferred for particular groups.

Lastly, you may wish to know that treatments containing COVID-19-neutralising antibodies have been secured from AstraZeneca for those who will not be able to benefit from a COVID-19 vaccine.

Thank you again for taking the time to write and I hope that this reply is helpful to you.

Yours sincerely,

Juanita Rowan
Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries
Department of Health and Social Care