

Public Health Link

From the Chief Medical Officer for Wales

Distribution: As Appendix 1

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Category: Immediate (cascade within 24 hours)

Title: JCVI advice to mitigate impact of B1.617.2 variant

Dear Colleagues,

On 14 May, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) issued advice regarding the use of COVID-19 vaccines to mitigate the impact of the B1.617.2 Variant of Concern (VOC-21APR-02), colloquially referred to as the India 2 variant.

Specifically the JCVI advice was as follows:

“Due to the rapid rise in cases of the B1.617.2 Variant of Concern and notable transmission in parts of the country, the JCVI advises that every effort is made to promote vaccine uptake in those who remain unvaccinated in priority cohorts 1 to 9 – these people remain at highest risk of severe outcomes from COVID-19.

Where vaccine supply allows, particularly in areas where B1.617.2 is a major threat, the second dose of vaccine should be brought forward from 12 to 8 weeks. This is only possible because everyone in the Phase 1 priority groups has already been offered a first dose.

Alongside these measures, the vaccine programme should continue to be rolled out as quickly as possible. The capacity of vaccination centres should be maximised to enable rapid rollout.”

In Wales, the COVID-19 vaccination programme has progressed at considerable pace. More than 80% of adults in Wales have had at least one dose of vaccine and uptake in the highest risk groups exceeds 90%, and over 95% in those aged 70 and over. In the coming weeks we will have offered vaccination to every adult in Wales and Health Boards will continue to have robust processes to ensure ‘no-one is left behind’. Anyone who for whatever reason did not have their vaccine when initially called, should now contact their health board to arrange an appointment. The NHS is working to ensure every adult in Wales is vaccinated.

In line with the JCVI advice, we will be shortening the interval between the first and second doses of vaccine for people most at risk from COVID-19. This will be targeted towards people living in areas where there are particular concerns regarding transmission of the B.1.617.2 variant and in accordance with vaccine supplies. This approach will be led by health boards' Vaccine leads and Incident Management Teams who will work to prioritise local supply in collaboration with national leads. Completion of the two dose course is especially important for the best protection against existing and new variant strains of the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

The emergence of new international and UK variants is to be expected. We will continue to work with vaccine manufacturers to ensure vaccines are developed to reduce the risk of emerging Variants of Concern.

Our vaccination programme, alongside the other control measures we are taking, provide a route out of the pandemic. It is critical that all individuals take up their offer of the vaccine without delay, in order to ensure both that they are protected and that we prevent hospitalisations, deaths and continue to protect the NHS.

It remains critical to reduce the spread of COVID-19 that in addition to being vaccinated we continue to follow existing advice about hand washing, face coverings and keeping socially distanced, being tested when required and self-isolating when necessary and when asked do so by the NHS Test, Trace and Protect service.

We are grateful for the efforts and dedication of everyone who has been involved in delivering the vaccination programme in Wales; your effort are helping us to progress out of the pandemic.

Yours sincerely,



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To: Health Boards and NHS Trusts:

Chief Executives

Medical Directors

Nurse Directors

Hospital Principals and Chief Pharmacists

To: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership to cascade to:

- GPs
- Community Pharmacists
- Independent hospitals

Cc: Public Health Wales
Directors of Public Health