

Coronavirus – new vaccine rollout began on Monday

The Scottish Government rolled out the first of the Oxford/AstraZeneca on Monday with the help of GP practices on Tayside.

Patients there were among the first in Scotland to receive the newly approved vaccine. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) gave this one the green light on 30 December and it is being made available to distribution centres all over the country. The transportation and delivery of this vaccine is made easier as it can be stored at higher temperatures than the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine which must be stored at very low temperatures.

NHS Tayside is rolling out the vaccines through GP practices in the community, while continuing to vaccinate elderly residents and staff in care homes. The AstraZeneca vaccine was procured on behalf of the four nations by the UK Government, who have ordered 100 million doses, of which Scotland will get 8.2% based on its population. As with the Pfizer vaccine, this second vaccine provides an important additional layer of protection to all adults but particularly those most at risk from serious illness and death from Covid-19.

Age is recognised as the greatest risk factor, and guidance from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has retained the same Phase 1 priority list for both vaccines. The government says that the priority now is to vaccinate as many people with their first dose as quickly as possible, working through that priority list. The advice that

the second dose for both vaccines can be given up to 12 weeks after the first means that more people can get protection from the first vaccination more quickly. The second dose does however remain critical for longer term protection and to complete the course.

Health Secretary Jeane Freeman said: "Seeing the AstraZeneca vaccine being administered to people in the community aged over 80 is a good way to start the New Year and I'm grateful to everyone in NHS Tayside and boards across the country for their work in preparing for the delivery of this newest vaccine.

"Oxford AstraZeneca has the advantage of being much easier to store and transport, which means it is easier to administer in local settings. We are also expecting to receive it in significantly larger quantities than the Pfizer vaccine.

"When it is your turn to be vaccinated you will be contacted by your local health board and I urge you to please take up the offer.

"While vaccination is one of the most important tools we have as we work our way out of this pandemic, we must all continue our work to suppress the virus in Scotland. This means rigorously complying with the restrictions where we live and making sure we continue to wear face coverings, maintain 2m distance from others outside our own household and wash our hands regularly.

"These three strands – following all we need to do to suppress the virus, using our expanded testing programme to identify cases and break chains of transmission and rolling out vaccination as fast as supplies allow – are the three critical actions that will see us move, step by step, to a brighter year ahead."

Associate Director of Public Health Dr Daniel Chandler, Immunisations Co-ordinator, who is overseeing the roll out of

the Covid-19 vaccination programme in Tayside said: “The efforts of our vaccination teams have been amazing and it is testament to a real whole team approach that sees the first over-80s in the general population have their jabs today in Tayside.

“The availability and mobility of the Oxford Astrazeneca vaccine gives us the opportunity to start to roll out the biggest vaccine programme that the UK has ever seen across our communities. Over-80s are the first priority group and patients will be contacted directly to attend a vaccination session.

“Today’s commencement of the community roll-out marks an important next phase in our response to COVID-19. It will act to suppress the virus in our communities to protect those who are most vulnerable, but the plea from all of us in the NHS is keep sticking with all the guidance.”

James Shaw (82), who was one of the first to be vaccinated alongside his wife Malita, also 82, said: “My wife and I are delighted to be receiving this vaccination. I have asthma and bronchitis and I have been desperate to have it so I am really pleased to be one of the first to be getting it.

“I know it takes a little while for the vaccine to work but after today I know that I will feel a bit less worried about going out. I will still be very careful and avoid busy places but knowing I have been vaccinated will really help me.

“All of my friends have said they are going to have the vaccine when it is their turn and I would encourage everyone who is offered this vaccination to take it.”

AstraZeneca is working with its global partners to continue building manufacturing capacity of up to three billion doses of the vaccine globally in 2021 on a rolling basis, pending regulatory approvals. The vaccine can be stored, transported and handled at normal refrigerated conditions (two-eight

degrees Celsius/ 36-46 degrees Fahrenheit) for at least six months and administered within existing healthcare settings.

AstraZeneca continues to engage with governments, multilateral organisations and collaborators around the world to ensure broad and equitable access to the vaccine at no profit for the duration of the pandemic.