

UK Government respond to online petition to vaccinate first responders

Almost 60,000 people have signed the UK Government petition to Prioritise COVID-19 vaccines for first responders (police, fire, ambulance)

The petition reads: "The British Government need to prioritise and deploy the COVID-19 vaccine to First Responders alongside NHS workers. First Responders are at a higher risk of contracting and transmitting COVID-19 due to their increased level of exposure with the general public every day and lack of regular testing."



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A spokesperson for the Department of Health and Social Care responded: "For phase I of the vaccine roll-out the key principles of advice by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation are to reduce mortality, to protect the health and care systems, and save lives.

"The NHS has been working alongside its health and social care partners to ensure the vaccine can be administered safely and effectively as part of the largest vaccination programme undertaken in its history.

"The government and the NHS are working hard to ensure everyone who is 70 and over, our health and social care workers and the clinically extremely vulnerable are offered the vaccine by mid-February. 4.6 million people across the UK have now received their first dose of a COVID-19 vaccine and

nearly half a million have received their second dose.

“There are now over 2700 sites across the UK already offering vaccines to those at risk by age and clinical priority. 993 local vaccination services, 206 hospital hubs and 17 large scale vaccination centres have been established across England. The network will continue to expand and evolve as we progress the deployment in the months ahead. We will expand the programme so all adults can be vaccinated by the autumn.

“The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) is the independent medical and scientific expert body which advises the UK Government on prioritisation for all vaccines. The committee’s membership is made up of practising clinicians and individuals from academia who have considered and continue to consider the impact of Covid-19 and population prioritisation as new data emerges.

“For phase one of the vaccine roll-out, the underlying principles at the forefront of the advice by the JCVI are to reduce mortality, to protect the health and social care systems, and to save lives. Given the current epidemiological situation in the UK, evidence indicates that the best option for preventing mortality in the initial phase of the programme is to directly protect persons most at risk. Having identified age as being the biggest determining factor to increased mortality, vaccinations have been prioritised to care home residents and staff and those aged over 80, followed by health and social care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and clinical risk factors.

“Frontline health and social care workers are at increased personal risk of exposure to infection with COVID-19 and of transmitting that infection to susceptible and vulnerable patients in health and social care settings. The JCVI considers frontline health and social care workers who provide care to vulnerable people a high priority for vaccination.

“Staff involved in direct patient care are included in the definition, as are paramedics and ambulance drivers as they too form part of this priority cohort and are categorised as frontline healthcare workers. In addition, if a first responder is identified as being in one of the at-risk cohorts, they will be contacted by the NHS at the appropriate time based on the JCVI’s advice.

“The JCVI continues to review its advice to the Government based on the live data it receives. Whilst phase one is currently aimed at reducing mortality based on age and clinical risk factors, phase two may be aimed at vaccinating those at high risk of exposure and/or those delivering key public services. Further data will confirm the next steps and the Department of Health and Social Care will listen carefully to the independent experts and work closely with its partners to best implement this.

“Finally, we thank the first responders for all the incredible work that they have been doing throughout the pandemic, and we give our assurances that we are working hard to ensure everyone who has been clinically prioritised to receive a vaccine will have access to a vaccine as soon as possible.”

The Petitions Committee will take a look at this petition and its response. They can press the government for action and gather evidence. If this petition reaches 100,000 signatures, the Committee will consider it for a debate.