

*From the Permanent Secretary
Sir Chris Wormald*



Department of Health & Social Care

Rt Hon Meg Hillier MP
Chair, Public Accounts Committee
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*Sent via email to:
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23 February 2021

Dear Chair,

Re: Vaccination against COVID-19 for outreach workers helping rough sleepers

Thank you for your letter of 12 February regarding vaccination priorities for outreach workers helping rough sleepers. I can assure you that this matter was considered and addressed from an early stage of the vaccination programme and frontline homelessness staff who fit the criteria for frontline social care workers directly working with people clinically vulnerable to COVID-19, will be eligible for COVID-19 vaccination. We share your view that we must protect our front-line homelessness workforce, without whom we would not have been able to protect so many vulnerable people over the last year.

The Government has been following the advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) on prioritisation of the COVID-19 vaccine, an independent committee made up of scientific and clinical experts. The JCVI have advised that the first priorities for any COVID-19 vaccination programme should be for the prevention of COVID-19 mortality, morbidity and the protection of health and social care staff and systems – which includes frontline health and social care workers.

In a letter to all Local Authority Chief Executives on 8 January, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government encouraged local authorities to consider whether their local frontline homelessness staff fit into the criteria for frontline social care workers directly working with people clinically vulnerable to COVID-19, who are in cohort 2 on the priority list for the vaccination. This is underlined by the principal aim of achieving high rates of vaccination amongst frontline social care workers who provide care closely and regularly with those who are clinically vulnerable to COVID-19. Local authorities should refer to NHS guidance on the vaccine deployment in social care workers to support this. Where local areas have identified frontline homelessness staff who fit these criteria, then they should have been offered vaccination alongside other frontline social care workers.



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We recognise that many people experiencing homelessness have health problems and may struggle to access the support they need. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) announced £10 million in January 2021 to further support local authorities to bring people sleeping rough into emergency accommodation. They have asked local authorities to support everyone sleeping rough or brought into emergency accommodation to register with a GP, through which they can access the COVID-19 vaccine (in line with JCVI prioritisation) and have their wider health needs met.

NHSEI, working with partners such as Groundswell have launched the 'Everyone is welcome in general practice' initiative, which encourages and supports people to register with a GP. Practices should not turn people away because they do not have proof of ID, address or immigration status. However, unregistered patients can also be vaccinated.

Overseas visitors to England, including anyone living in the UK without permission, will not be charged for testing for coronavirus or vaccination against coronavirus. No immigration checks are needed for these services. Healthcare professionals will not usually share personal medical data, even if requested by other government agencies, as this is likely to be a violation of a healthcare professional's obligations under the Data Protection Act and patient confidentiality. More information on data sharing can be found here: [NHS entitlements: migrant health guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/nhs-entitlements-migrant-health-guide)

We encourage all undocumented migrants and asylum seekers to register with their local GP to allow them to be contacted at the appropriate time based on the prevalence of certain underlying health conditions. For those not registered with a GP, NHS Regional teams, working with various local systems will reach out to those individuals to ensure they are offered the vaccine to avoid inequalities in access. Those without an NHS number will still be able to book an appointment to be vaccinated.

The Vaccine Uptake Plan, published on 13 February, reiterated our local, community-led approach (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-uptake-plan>). Local systems are best placed to reach out to our diverse communities and avoid inequalities in access, and every system should have a plan for full coverage for health inclusion groups. Regional teams working with local systems have identified local health inclusion groups that will require access to the vaccine, within eligible patient cohorts. Locally commissioned arrangements to reach these groups may include local NHS Community & Mental Health Trust providers, Primary Care Networks (PCNs) or partnership activity with statutory and voluntary services.

The UK has a very successful record delivering vaccination programmes, and the COVID-19 vaccine deployment programme is the biggest vaccination programme in NHS history. Vaccine deployment in England started on 8 December and by 17 February, nearly 16million across the UK had been given a first dose of vaccine. We

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understand this is a challenging period and we are working hard to ensure those most at risk receive the vaccine as soon as possible.

We will continue to work closely with Public Health England, NHS England, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and local authorities to ensure that the needs of the homelessness front line workforce, as well as the people they support, can be met.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Wormald'.

**SIR CHRIS WORMALD
PERMANENT SECRETARY**