



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
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The Rt. Hon. Greg Clark MP
Chair of Science and Technology Select Committee

By email

8 December 2021

Dear Greg,

The rollout of treatments for COVID-19 this winter

Following on from our previous correspondence on 20 October, I am writing to provide a formal update to the Committee on the deployment of antivirals from December.

The UK Government, the NHS, and Adult Social Care have put in place plans to help people stay well this winter. This includes the rollout of antivirals and continued access to therapeutics to treat COVID-19.

Access to these treatments is in addition to COVID-19 vaccines, which remain the most important intervention for protecting those most vulnerable in the UK. Having additional measures is important now more than ever with the discovery of new variants of concern, such as Omicron.

As you are aware, the UK government recently announced the procurement of two novel oral antivirals for treating COVID-19. We are ready to announce details on how new community-based treatments, including the first of these antivirals molnupiravir, will be made available to NHS patients across the UK as well as the monoclonal antibody treatment Ronapreve, which will be available in the community from next week.

Molnupiravir is a licensed treatment for COVID-19. On 4 November 2021, the MHRA granted molnupiravir a Conditional Marketing Authorisation in Great Britain and a temporary authorisation under Regulation 174 for Northern Ireland to ensure supply across all of the UK. It is the first oral antiviral to be made available which was developed for the treatment of COVID-19.

Another monoclonal antibody, Xevudy, was approved by the MHRA on 2nd December 2021, and will be available early next year.

There are two access routes to receive COVID-19 community treatments this winter.

National Study

A new national study called PANORAMIC¹, sponsored by the University of Oxford and funded by the National Institute for Health Research is now open for recruitment of individuals living anywhere in the UK who meet the following criteria:

- Have received a PCR positive test for COVID-19.
- Feel unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 that started in the last 5 days.
- Are aged 50+, or 18-49 years old with an underlying medical condition that can increase the chance of having severe COVID-19.

A national study is necessary as although the company-run clinical trials of molnupiravir completed so far have identified that the treatment has a benefit in reducing the risk of hospitalisation from COVID-19 in high-risk patients, the trials only included unvaccinated participants. The UK, however, has a mostly vaccinated adult population. A national study will allow us to make molnupiravir available to high-risk UK patients this winter, whilst also collecting more data to see if the same level of benefit is found when the treatment is given specifically to the mostly vaccinated UK population. This data will enable NHS England and the Devolved Administrations to design an evidence-based plan for deployment to those who would benefit from them most. It will also provide GPs with all the information necessary to inform their prescribing of these new treatments.

Around 10,600 people will need to be recruited per antiviral procured to generate the data needed. It is therefore crucial that as many eligible patients as possible enrol onto the study as soon as they receive a positive PCR test for COVID-19. The quicker the recruitment target is met for the study, the faster the NHS can put in place appropriate plans to make the antivirals more widely available outside of the national study to those who would benefit most from them.

The study website can be found here: www.panoramictrial.org

Access to Community Treatments for the Highest-Risk Group

Patients deemed at the very highest risk of deterioration, hospitalisation or death from COVID-19 will be able to access treatments directly through the NHS, alongside the national study taking place. In England, eligible patients who receive a positive test will be assessed over the phone by an expert clinician from a COVID Medicines Delivery Unit (CMDU), who will review and discuss with the patient what the most appropriate could be for them.

Deployment of these treatments alongside the PANORAMIC national study to the highest risk patients is on the advice of an expert clinical group that set out the cohorts most likely to benefit from treatment, and a clinical policy then formulated by NHSE&I with their

¹ Platform Adaptive trial of NOvel antiViRals for eArly treatMent of COVID-19 In the Community

Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish counterparts and agreed by the Chief Medical Officers of all four UK nations.

While we are as well prepared as we can be, we recognise that this winter will be more challenging than many faced by the National Health Service and Adult Social Care. The rollout of these treatments is a significant milestone in the UK's battle against COVID-19 and will provide an additional layer of support for the most vulnerable in society.

The Department of Health and Social Care will continue to work across the health and care system and with the Devolved Administrations to ensure the successful deployment of COVID-19 treatments and to discover additional ways to protect the public as COVID-19 continues to evolve. We will further update the Science and Technology Committee once we confirm plans for wider deployment of antivirals next year.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Javid', with a stylized flourish at the end.

RT HON SAJID JAVID MP