

HUW MERRIMAN MP
(BEXHILL & BATTLE)



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Vaccination Update from Huw Merriman MP – 12 January 2021

Please find below information to help answer your questions on the local mass vaccination programme for Covid-19.

This update contains information on local vaccination centres, priority vaccination groups, vaccination types and logistics challenges and vaccination for care home staff and residents (including domiciliary and agency care staff)

Your local Vaccination Centres

At present vaccinations are taking place in hospital hubs; GP led vaccination services; roving services to care homes and the housebound; and in mass vaccination sites across the country.

Hospital hub vaccination services in Sussex were launched at the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton on 8th December 2020. Teams at the hospital have been vaccinating those over the age of 80 who were attending the hospital and health and care staff.

More local to us, the Conquest Hospital in Hastings and the Eastbourne DG Hospital went live over the last couple of weeks.

GP-led vaccination services are where the majority of the current population are being offered their vaccinations. In total in Sussex there are 15 sites which have gone live to date. In the majority, each service is supported by a number of GP practices (within their Primary Care Network footprint) working together to vaccinate their collective population. Currently in East Sussex, six GP-led vaccination services have gone live and have all started to vaccinate patients over the age of 80.

The Prime Minister has pledged that residents should not need to travel more than 10 miles to receive a vaccine. There are sites in Eastbourne, Lewes, Bexhill and Uckfield vaccinating local East Sussex residents. During this week, a GP-led vaccination service went live at The Hastings Centre, Kings Church, located on The Ridge in Hastings.

I am afraid that the weak spots in the constituency have been Rural Rother (which includes Battle) and Heathfield (including its surrounds). One notable town also needing another solution, albeit just outside the constituency, is Hailsham. I've been working with the Sussex Community NHS Foundation to provide a solution for Rural Rother, for Heathfield and surrounding villages.

Bexhill and surrounds:

The nearest site for Bexhill residents, and those nearby, is at Sidley Medical Practice.

Pevensey and surrounds:

The Princes Park Health Centre is providing vaccination coverage for constituents in and around Pevensey.

With the Bexhill and Pevensey area having a vaccination centre nearby, I concentrate on the areas which do not.

Rural Rother (including Battle)

For numerous reasons, we have not had a working Primary Care Network solution in these parts therefore work has been taking place with the Sussex Community NHS Foundation and the local GP surgeries to agree a system to vaccinate their patients. I raised the lack of a solution for Rural Rother with the Prime Minister in the House of Commons at the beginning of January.

As a solution, rural Rother GP practices will be served by a vaccination hub at Etchingham village hall which is expected to go live this Friday 15 January. The Etchingham vaccine centre will be run by those within the Sussex Community NHS Foundation who have stepped up to help and our local GP teams. If your GP is within this area, you will expect to receive your vaccine at Etchingham. I have had a number of constituents contact me from Rother Levels asking why they need to travel to Etchingham. The reason is because Etchingham has been set up to handle the Pfizer vaccine logistics and because surgeries within the area have not been able to sign up to deliver the Pfizer vaccine. The aim is to ensure that stocks of Astra Zeneca get delivered so residents can receive this vaccination at a more local level.

If supplies of the Astra Zeneca vaccine are supplied, these could be taken from Etchingham to your local GP for you to be vaccinated at the surgery. For this to happen, your GP must have signed up to the Enhanced Service Contract. Given the time to sign has closed, I have asked the Vaccines Minister to urgently allow GPs further time to sign up now that the Astra Zeneca option gives more GPs the scope to vaccinate locally.

If it is clear that Pfizer vaccines continue to be the chief supply, I will be keen for the Sussex Community NHS Foundation to assist in the opening of another centre within easier reach. This will require local action as well.

Heathfield and its surrounds

Patient from Heathfield will receive their vaccinations at the Meads Medical Centre in Uckfield (8 miles away from Heathfield). This is part of the [Greater Wealden Primary Care Network](#) and this is where the group have determined the Pfizer vaccine can be best distributed. Whilst it is good that Heathfield has a solution, given its size, I do not

feel this is adequate for a parish of 12,000 residents, with other villages such as Dallington also in need of a solution. It is not ideal for a cohort prioritised by age and vulnerability, to be asked to travel 8 miles to Uckfield.

I have had a number of constituents contact me from Heathfield and its surrounding area asking why they need to travel to Uckfield. The reason is because the Primary Care Network covering this part of Wealden has identified Uckfield as the local centre to deliver the Pfizer vaccine. The aim is to ensure that stocks of Astra Zeneca get delivered so residents can receive this vaccination at a more local level.

If supplies of the Astra Zeneca vaccine are supplied, these could be taken to your local GP surgery for you to be vaccinated at the surgery. For this to happen, your GP must have signed up to the Enhanced Service Contract. Given the time to sign has closed, I have asked the Vaccines Minister to urgently allow GPs further time to sign up now that the Astra Zeneca option gives more GPs the scope to vaccinate locally. I used Heathfield (and its large number of residents) as my example.

If it is clear that Pfizer vaccines continue to be the chief supply, the Sussex Community NHS Foundation will need to assist in the opening of another centre within easier reach. This will require local action as well. I have already put forward the view to the Foundation that Heathfield needs a local centre given its large population size.

Vaccination Types and Logistics Challenges

When the vaccine programme was developed, it was hoped that GP surgeries would inoculate their own patients. The Pfizer vaccine was the first vaccine to be approved. It has logistical challenges with its deployment and this has led to a number of GP surgeries, particularly in rural areas, being unable to participate. With the Astra Zeneca vaccine now approved, rural areas may now be better served as supplies arrive.

The following vaccines have now been approved for use by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency:

Pfizer Vaccine

This was the first vaccine to be approved for use but it has logistical challenges (including transportation type and storage conditions of minus 70C). As a result of the challenges, GP surgeries have formed Primary Care Networks in order to provide one centre to deliver the vaccine. East Sussex has two areas where no such network has been able to source a centre. These are Rural Rother (including Battle) and Hailsham. The Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust has worked in partnership with the local GPs to find premises (for Rural Rother; Etchingam Village Hall will open for vaccinations on Friday 15 January).

Astra-Zeneca Vaccine

This was signed off for use at the beginning of January. This vaccine can be stored at fridge-temperature levels and is therefore more effective for GP surgeries to use along the lines of the flu jab. It is hoped, as more supplies become available, that residents in Rural Rother (including Battle) and Heathfield, and its surrounds, will be able to receive it locally, via their GP surgery, and not be required to travel longer distances to receive

a vaccine. Residential care settings are also better able to deliver this vaccine. As care home residences are the highest priority for the vaccination, this may have an impact on supplies to surgeries.

Moderna

This has just been signed off as the latest vaccine. It requires storage of minus 20C (equivalent to a freezer). We await supplies in the UK and have an order in for 17 million.

Supplies and Logistical challenges

The UK has ordered 100 million doses of the Astra Zeneca (enough to inoculate 50 million people) and 40 million of the Pfizer vaccine. Combined, these will inoculate the entire population. There are other vaccine candidates which are being trialled and for which the UK has orders in.

Regardless of the orders, the vaccinations are in short supply and we need to be more upfront in saying this in national media. The Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust do not put supply orders in; they get what is made available and this could be either of the two vaccines. I have urgently lobbied the Vaccines Minister to ask for more Astra-Zeneca for the rural areas.

As of today, the Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust have been told how much of the vaccine, and what type, will be delivered for this week. Tomorrow, they will find out the numbers for next week. They have been assured that there are sufficient numbers to vaccinate all of the first four priority groups by 15 February.

Nationally, we are aiming to vaccinate 15 million people (the first 4 of the 9 current priority groups) by 15 February. This is an ambitious target given the supply requirements so I wish to personally caveat the end date. I'm doing all I can to ensure constituents are in the earlier part of this dateline.

In Sussex, 70,000 vaccinations have been delivered. As a comparison, Surrey have delivered 38,000 and the combined counties of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckingham have delivered 68,000. We expect each of the prioritisation groups to be delivered across East Sussex before the next cohort is vaccinated (so those in areas of the county where it is slower to start will have to catch up).

Priority Vaccination Groups and numbers

The Sussex Community NHS Foundation is working to vaccinate as many people as possible as quickly as possible but deploying a vaccine at this scale is unprecedented. Timing will be dependent to a large extent on manufacturing timescales and supply.

We have to be realistic that this enormous logistical task is going to take some time to get completely up and running, but good progress is already being made. The Government has set a target of vaccinating the four top priority groups (over 13 million people) by the middle of February, and I will continue to do all I can as the local MP to support the efforts of the CCG in ensuring we meet this target. This week the Prime Minister announced that 2.4 million people have been vaccinated. Across, Sussex, as of Saturday 9 January, 70,000 residents

have been vaccinated. This compares to 38,000 in Surrey and 68,000 across the combined counties of Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire.

The Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunity advises that the first priorities for the COVID-19 vaccination programme should be the prevention of mortality and the maintenance of the health and social care systems. As the risk of mortality from COVID-19 increases with age, prioritisation is primarily based on age. The order of priority groups for vaccination are as follows:

1. Residents in a care home for older adults and their carers.
2. All those 80 years of age and over and frontline health and social care workers
3. All those 75 years of age and over
4. All those 70 years of age and over and clinically extremely vulnerable individuals
5. All those 65 years of age and over
6. All individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality
7. All those 60 years of age and over
8. All those 55 years of age and over
9. All those 50 years of age and over

It is estimated that taken together, these groups represent around 99% of preventable mortality from COVID-19. The statistics on the number of people that have been vaccinated will be released daily online and I will be monitoring this data, and the progress being made, closely.

I know that work is continuing to set out future priorities and I will be studying this carefully. The committee is currently of the view that the key focus for the second phase of vaccination could be on further preventing hospitalisation. Vaccination of those at increased risk of exposure to SARS-CoV-2 due to their occupation could also be a priority in the next phase. This could include first responders, the military, those involved in the justice system, teachers, transport workers, and public servants essential to the pandemic response.

With parts of the constituency not moving as fast as the more urban parts of Sussex, I am reassured that the County will look to ensure that it delivers to the first four priority groups by 15 February before moving onto the next. This will be done by ensuring supply is aimed at the areas where the first four cohorts still need to be vaccinated.

I am keen that we receive more regular detail on numbers vaccinated in order to explain and keep the pressure up. This will be achieved via improved national and local data which is expected to be released this week and will allow for a county by county picture.

The Health Secretary has committed to ensure that everyone who needs it will be vaccinated by Autumn. This should give comfort to those who do not qualify within the 9 priority groups.

This is a mammoth task and I appreciate concern about the speed at which we are delivering. Please note that, whilst the UK delivers its 2.4 millionth vaccination, France had delivered under 50,000 vaccines to its citizens as of Friday 8 January. We had been in a position of delivering more of the vaccine than the EU nations put together. I'd rather be more ambitious and seek to catch up with Israel ([which has the best global record](#)).

Vaccination for Care Home staff and residents

Across Sussex, 24% of care home residents have now been vaccinated. The Sussex Community NHS Foundation Trust (SCFT) have created a plan to get the remaining residents vaccinated over the next two weeks. For 60% of care homes, this will be delivered by the GP surgery which works within that area. For the remainder, the SCFT will provide the solution directly. Given the immediate target of two weeks, and this group being the highest priority, if extra Astra Zeneca supplies arrive then these may be delivered to vaccinate this priority group. This, in turn, may mean that we cannot immediately deliver the more localised solution to Rural Rother or Heathfield and their surrounds without further Astra Zeneca supplies.

Care homes have raised concerns about a lack of information about when they will receive the vaccine. In addition to my own update, I have asked the SCFT to contact all care homes to provide details and reassurance. I have also asked that economies of scale are utilised to deliver all care homes on the same road on the same day. I have been assured that all will be contacted this week.

Care Home staff are being vaccinated alongside residents are or via the hospital hubs. This will include agency, domiciliary and self-employed care and nursing staff. I am assured by the SCFT that there is a separate project to ensure that agency staff are not missed out by virtue of not being employees of care homes and they will receive communications about this by the end of this week, if not sooner. I will ensure that this remains a focus should agency staff not receive a vaccination within the two week period. NHS staff were the first to receive vaccinations in the hospital hubs. There are 70,000 NHS and care worker staff who need to receive the vaccine in East Sussex.

Thank you to all of the NHS and Caring staff who are doing such an amazing job.

[Further information is available on the Sussex Health and Care website which is being regularly updated.](#)