

COVID-19 Vaccination briefing – January 2021

This briefing focuses on the COVID-19 vaccine. Since the beginning of January we have received a significant volume of enquiries from the public about the vaccine, comprising of 35 out of 45 contacts (78%) in the first two weeks of the month. Opinions of the vaccine are generally positive, excluding a small minority, with people looking forward to receiving their vaccination.

However, despite the positive outlook, we are hearing that the lack of clarity regarding the roll out is generating anxiety amongst some people who are worried about slipping through the net. This has been particularly pronounced in the Harrogate district. We are also hearing of cases of people being asked to travel excessive distances to receive their vaccination – this is concerning given the rural nature of North Yorkshire and its older demographic.

Lack of communication leading to anxiety

Whilst many people are looking forward to receiving the vaccine, the uncertainty around when and where they will receive their vaccination is creating a lot of anxiety.

Many over 80s, after 9 months effectively isolated in their houses (such as myself with no close contact with any other person) are suffering from STRESS, and this is being made considerably worse at the moment by the knowledge that the vaccination is coming but having absolutely no idea if they will be contacted tomorrow, next week, or in three months' time, and whether by letter, email, text or phone call!

- Website response, 26th December

The repetition of the official guidance; asking people to wait to be contacted, and that the system is working through a priority list – whilst clear – is being considered insufficient by many. In our communications with the public, these messages are being met with frustration, and sometimes anger.

Recommendation 1: Updated messaging is needed, with more detail concerning how many have been vaccinated, how long people in priority groups should expect to wait, and how they will be contacted

Concerns about being missed

The message of 'sit and wait' and 'don't contact us, we'll contact you' is not being responded to well due to people's previous experiences of the healthcare system:

All we have been advised is not to contact our GP just wait and we will be contacted. Anyone with any life experience of NHS and [the] government in general knows what falling through the cracks is like. It requires trust and confidence to just wait and I am afraid neither has been earned.

- Website response, 12th January

This anxiety has been worse for people who have had to cancel their original appointment and are now waiting for their rescheduled appointment. They fear they may have fallen through the cracks, and an inability for them to speak to someone to check is magnifying their worries. Confusion over the priority for receiving a vaccination is adding to this. We have been hearing people concerned that younger and/or less vulnerable people (but still in the 80+ priority category) are receiving the vaccine before them or their loved ones.

Recommendation 2: A system (telephone number or website) should be provided for people to ask questions about the vaccination

Vaccine delivery in Harrogate

Feedback that we have received has revealed that communication in Harrogate is distinctly poor. Information regarding the vaccine roll-out in Harrogate is sparse. Most GP websites in Harrogate provide little information about it.

We are aware that a vaccination centre has been established at the Yorkshire Event Centre, yet there is no information on the Yorkshire Event Centre website regarding the vaccination and internet searching for the vaccine in Harrogate produces little concrete or official information. This is giving an impression that Harrogate is doing poorly in its response.

My mother in law is 93 years old and has had no contact from anyone regarding Covid vaccination. When are all 90+ people in the district expected to have had the vaccination? Nobody is prepared to give any update on how many people in Harrogate have already had the first injection. It appears that Harrogate is being let down compared to many other areas. Information needed please...

- Website response, 8th January

Desperate, people in Harrogate are calling their GP practice only to be told 'that there's nothing we can do. It's being done centrally.' This is leaving members of the public in Harrogate feeling that there is '*deafening silence*' (8th Jan) at a local level with '*nowhere to turn*' (15th Jan).

Most worrying is a call we received on the 15th of January regarding someone's 92-year-old mother who had received a phone call informing them of an appointment. Unfortunately, their mother can be forgetful, and was unable to recall the details of the call or understand her notes. With no way of finding out about his mother's appointment at the Yorkshire Event Centre in Harrogate, he was worried she would miss her appointment.

Recommendation 3: There should be greater publicity about arrangements in Harrogate, with contact information made available

Travel

Lastly, we have received feedback from people who are struggling to reach their vaccination centre. Difficulties in travel is a longstanding issue in North Yorkshire due to being highly rural. The use of vaccination centres may have advantages of scale, but it also places them further away from people – the target population being less likely to have private transport and too vulnerable to use public transport.

Recommendation 4: Provide a system of transport for people who have limited ability to travel and/or provide vaccines closer to peoples' homes

Questions from the public

Below is an example of some of the questions we have been receiving:

- How can I make sure I have not fallen through the system?
- What should I do if I miss my appointment due to the snow?
- I have a hospital appointment soon. Will I get my vaccine before my surgery?
- Why are younger and less vulnerable people receiving the vaccine before others?
- How do we know that the website address on the invite letter is not a scam?
- What are the risks to the different vaccines?
- Can I choose which vaccine I will receive?
- What is the daily vaccination capacity and how many people in the current priority categories are still to be vaccinated?