

Health charities back vaccines drive for those at risk

- Charities write open letter to encourage those with underlying health conditions to come forward for the jab
- More than half of cohort 6 have already been vaccinated
- Vaccine drive includes NHS text alert sent to more than two million people in this group

People with underlying conditions including cancer, diabetes and heart disease are being encouraged to come forward for a Covid-19 vaccine by leading UK health charities in an open letter published today.

Frontline charities, including Mencap, Diabetes UK and Lupus UK, have asked those with underlying medical conditions, their carers, and those with learning disabilities on their GP register, to book a vaccination to protect themselves and those around them from coronavirus.

People in cohort 6 have been prioritised for the vaccine because they have conditions that mean they are more likely to become seriously unwell from coronavirus.

More than half of those in cohort 6 have already received their first dose of the vaccine and it's hoped that the charities' letter – alongside text messages from the NHS – will help to increase take up further among those in this at-risk group.

The charities who signed the open letter are among 22 who have joined together in partnership to reassure those they support about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine.

GP services already have been contacting this cohort but those who have not yet received a letter can get a quick and convenient appointment at a vaccination centre or community pharmacy by using the national booking system or calling 119. The NHS have sent text messages to people in this group with a link so they can book their appointment.

The vaccine is safe and effective and very few people are advised not to have it. However, if you have any concerns, you can discuss these if you book over the phone, or with a health professional at your appointment.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

“The backing of the charities who work every day to support those who are entitled to a jab as part of cohort 6 is a great boost for the vaccine rollout and shows what we can achieve when we pull together.

“This open letter is a hugely important way to reassure those with underlying health conditions, and their carers, about the safety and effectiveness of the vaccine.

“The charities’ support for this national vaccine effort is invaluable in encouraging more people to come forward and helping us to save lives.”

These vital charities support those included in priority vaccination categories, including cohort 6 which covers individuals aged 16 to 64 with certain long-term conditions identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation as being at higher clinical risk from Covid-19.

Underlying health conditions faced by people in cohort 6 include chronic respiratory, heart, kidney, liver disease and neurological conditions, including multiple sclerosis (MS) and epilepsy, stroke, vascular disease, diabetes mellitus, immunosuppression due to a health condition or treatment, asplenia or dysfunction of the spleen, morbid obesity, severe mental illness, as well as sickle cell, lupus and those on GP learning disability registers.

Cohort 6 also includes carers who are eligible for a carer’s allowance, or those who are the sole or primary carer of an elderly or disabled person who is at increased risk of Covid-19 mortality and therefore clinically vulnerable.

Minister for Vaccines Nadhim Zahawi said:

“We have already given a first dose of the vaccine to more than half of those in cohort 6 and I am grateful to the charities who are encouraging more people in that group to come forward.

“The vaccine is our way out of this pandemic and offers the chance to protect yourself and others – that’s why it’s vital that people get their jab.

“This open letter should help to reassure those with any concerns the vaccine is safe and supported by more than twenty of our most trusted charities.

“I would like to thank them all for backing this life-saving campaign and offering their expertise and assistance to support the largest medical deployment in British history.”

Notes to editors

Open letter

We are writing today to encourage people living with an underlying health condition in cohort 6 to come forward for a Covid-19 vaccine.

People with these conditions, including their carers, and those with learning disabilities on the learning disability register, have been prioritised by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation because they are more likely to become seriously unwell from Covid-19.

The vast majority of you should already have been invited for vaccination and more than half of you have already received your first dose.

Some of you may still be waiting for a letter from your GP.

But the good news is, even if you have not received your letter yet, you can now get an appointment at a vaccination centre or community pharmacy, quickly and easily, by using the national booking system or calling 119 in England.

We are proud to support the vaccination roll-out and are here to support you.

The vaccine is safe and effective and very few people are advised not to have it. However, if you have any concerns, you can discuss these when you book, or with a health professional at your appointment.

Over 20 million people in the UK have had their first dose and great progress has been made by the NHS.

We are very pleased to see the Covid-19 vaccination roll-out providing protection for people, like you, who are most at risk from the virus.

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The vaccines that have been approved for use in the UK have met the strict safety standards set by the medicines regulator on safety, quality and effectiveness.

To protect yourself and your family, friends and colleagues, you still need to follow the current government guidance on social contact after receiving your vaccine.

Please come forward to have the jab. It will help save lives and offers the best form of protection from this terrible virus.

Further notes to editors

Those using the national booking service can input their NHS number which will identify whether they are eligible according to their health records.

The campaign video is available here –
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJdKpMG54sM&feature=youtu.be>

The organisations within the partnership, 18 of which have also signed the letter, are:

- ACLT (African Caribbean Leukaemia Trust)
- Anthony Nolan
- Asthma UK

- British Heart Foundation
- British Liver Trust
- British Lung Foundation
- Cancer Research UK
- Carers UK
- Diabetes UK
- Epilepsy Action
- Kidney Care UK
- Kidney Research UK
- Lupus UK
- Macmillan Cancer Support
- Mencap
- MS Society
- National Kidney Federation
- Rethink Mental Illness
- Sickle Cell Society
- Stroke Association
- Terrence Higgins Trust
- Versus Arthritis

Unpaid carers are included in cohort 6 providing they:

- are eligible for a carer's allowance
- are identified as a primary carer by their GP
- are receiving support following a carer's assessment by their local council or from a local carer's organisation
- are the sole or primary carer who provides close personal care or face to face support for an elderly or disabled person who is clinically vulnerable to COVID-19