

Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 7 January 2021

Good afternoon, today I'm joined by Sir Simon Stevens, Chief Executive of NHS England

and Brigadier Phil Prosser, who is Commander of Military Support to the Vaccine Delivery Programme across our United Kingdom.

Because I know there is now one question at the very top of your minds

and that is how fast and how effectively we can get these millions of new vaccines into the arms of the most vulnerable and those who need them most.

And you want to know that we in government,

the NHS, the Armed Forces, local and regional government, government at every level

are truly throwing everything at it

round the clock if necessary.

And I believe that with the country once again in lockdown

and all the difficulties that means for you, for your family, for students, for education, for your businesses,

and of course with the tragic number of deaths that we're seeing and that we've seen today,

you have a right to understand exactly how we are cracking this problem and how the national vaccine effort is progressing.

And you rightly want to know how we are going to reach the target that I set out earlier this week

of offering a slot for vaccination by 15th of February for everyone in those key groups identified by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation

That's over 12 million people in England, and 15 million in the UK

including older care home residents and staff

everyone 70 or over

all frontline NHS and care staff

and all those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

And just to remind you of the importance of these groups for fighting the

disease

they account for 88 per cent of all those who have sadly lost their lives.

And so our tactics are

first to use the immense natural capacity of the NHS

and by the end of next week there will be

over 1,000 GP-led sites providing vaccines

223 hospital sites

seven giant vaccination centres

and a first wave of 200 community pharmacies

If all goes well these together should have the capacity to deliver hundreds of thousands of vaccines per day by Jan 15th

and it is our plan that everyone should have a vaccination available within a radius of ten miles.

And it follows from that that the limits will not be on our distributional power but on the supply of vaccines.

And I have no doubt that we have enough supply to vaccinate these four groups by the Feb 15th deadline and we also have the distributional network to do it

and to continue an expanding programme down that priority list.

Yes, let's be clear this is a national challenge on a scale like nothing we have seen before

and it will require an unprecedented national effort.

And, of course there will be difficulties

appointments will be changed

but as Brigadier Prosser will shortly explain

the army is working hand in glove with the NHS and local councils to set up our vaccine network

and using battle preparation techniques to help us keep up the pace.

We will publish our full vaccine deployment plan on Monday

along with daily updates on the progress we are making.

We have now vaccinated 1.26 million people in England,

113,000 in Scotland,

49,000 in Wales,

and 46,000 in Northern Ireland.

So altogether, nearly 1.5 million people across the UK have now received their first dose

and within 2-3 weeks all of them will have a very considerable degree of immunity.

And it is thanks to the arrival of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine which can be stored at room temperature,

that we can accelerate the pace of vaccination in care homes.

We are using that vaccine in care homes for the first time today

and by the end of the month we hope to have offered every elderly care home resident a vaccine.

Our new National Booking Service will also make it easier to book and access appointments

So I urge everyone to come forwards

because it's absolutely vital that we should have confidence in these vaccines.

And I want to thank everyone involved in this extraordinary national effort

all the GPs, nurses, pharmacists and all the staff behind the scenes

our armed forces

local councils

our scientists who have not only developed the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, the first ever life-saving treatment of Covid in the form of dexamethasone –

but I am pleased to tell you today, British scientific research has now contributed to the creation of more new lifesaving treatments that have just passed rigorous clinical trials.

In particular, Tocilizumab, sorry I'll say it again, Tocilizumab

and Sarilumab, they'll shortly be on everybody's lips

which have been found to reduce the risk of death for critically ill patients by almost a quarter

and they've cut time spent in intensive care by as much as ten days

and these lifesaving drugs will be available through the NHS with immediate effect,

potentially saving thousands of lives.

And finally again I want to thank you – the British public – for coming forward to be vaccinated

in the numbers that you have – still greater than all the countries of Europe put together.

And yes of course, we are in a race against time

but I can assure you we're doing everything we can to vaccinate as many people as possible across our whole United Kingdom.

And in the meantime

please stay at home, protect our NHS and save lives.

And now I'll hand over to Sir Simon Stevens