

# A Vaccination Update From The Wokingham Town Centre General Practices

A fortnight is a long time in a vaccination campaign...

Wokingham Town Centre's Covid-19 vaccination programme is being delivered by the four practices that comprise East Wokingham Primary Care Network, namely: Wooshill Medical Centre, New Wokingham Road Surgery, Burma Hills Surgery and Wokingham Medical Centre. The doctors and staff of these practices have vaccinated around 2600 patients at the Bradbury Centre, Wokingham during the course of the last fortnight. In addition, we've vaccinated virtually all residents and staff in our local older adult care homes, meaning that a total of nearly 3000 vaccinations have been performed in the opening two weeks of our vaccination programme. Furthermore, we expect to vaccinate another 2000 residents over the next few days as we receive more vaccine supply.

The importance of these numbers cannot be overstated as they represent almost all of the over 80-year olds and almost all of the older adult care home residents in East Wokingham Primary Care Network. NHS England has rightly prioritised this group of citizens as they have substantially higher complication and death rates from Covid-19 and it has been a real pleasure to catch up with 'old friends' on vaccination days.

From a practical and logistical perspective, we are particularly pleased that the vaccination effort has been achieved without any queues at the Bradbury Centre and while maintaining strict social distancing and infection control measures. We have been ably assisted by the Wokingham Volunteer Centre and the Wokingham Lions who have provided a seemingly limitless supply of volunteers who have braved the cold and rain in order to ensure that our most vulnerable citizens are vaccinated safely and efficiently.

We've been made aware of various misunderstandings that are being perpetuated on local social media and it may help residents' anxieties if some of these are clarified:

1. Some Primary Care Networks – and therefore some practices – started vaccinated before others. The order in which practices started vaccinating was not down to the practices themselves but largely as a result of guidance from NHS England. It's hopefully fairly obvious that vaccinating everyone nationally – simultaneously – might have problematic consequences were there to be widespread side effects.

2. The pace of vaccinating is dictated by vaccine supply and is not in the gift of practices. The vaccine supply is currently a little erratic and – we understand – is being actively managed by NHS England to ensure all regions have consistent supply. Please be assured that we are vaccinating as fast as we are receiving vaccine deliveries. If we only receive 400 doses, we can

only vaccinate 400 people.

3. Practices are delivering vaccines in age cohorts that are determined by NHS England. These cohorts reflect the need to vaccinate the most at-risk citizens first. The practices will contact everyone in cohort order, so please, please, please do not petition your practice to state that you have a special case – all you do is prevent our staff from doing their jobs.

4. Your practice is delivering the vaccination programme while simultaneously trying to maintain some degree of normal service – and often while having staff self-isolating. Vaccinating tens of thousands of our patients means that staff will be diverted from normal activities inevitably. Practices don't have access to a multitude of spare doctors and staff that can be parachuted in to assist at short notice – and therefore a reduction in non-clinical and clinical staff at your practice on vaccination days is inevitable. Despite our best efforts this may mean that it takes a little longer to answer the phone and it may mean that there is a delay in securing your desired appointment. So, please be patient with us as we try to deliver one of the most ambitious global vaccination programmes ever.

Finally, we have been humbled by the gratitude that many of you have shown. We have received countless messages of thanks and many of you have commented on how well-organised the Bradbury Centre operation has been. We are proud to be involved in the Covid-19 vaccination programme and the appreciation of our community means a great deal to us – thank you.

Dr Vipin Bhardwaj  
Clinical Director, East Wokingham Primary Care Network

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## [When will we be allowed out of lockdown?](#)

The government's scientific advisers come across as pessimists about our future. They seem to think the policy answer for wherever we are in combatting the virus is more and longer lockdown. If the virus is spreading more we need tougher lockdown. If it is falling we need to continue with lockdown as only lockdown can get it falling. If a tough lockdown is in place and it does not seem to be working it is the fault of the public, as too many must be breaking the rules.

The government accepted nine months of variable lockdowns last year, and sustained it with the public by suggesting as soon as enough people have been vaccinated we can relax. Now the government advisers are telling us it is not as simple as that. They will not be satisfied even when all the people most at risk of dying from the disease have been vaccinated. They say they do not know whether people who are vaccinated can still pass the virus on, nor how

long immunity from vaccination might last. The advisers leave most of us without reliable figures on bed occupancy, NHS capacity and Nightingale use. They have changed the definitions of what is a covid death, and decline to tell us where the various numbers have to reach before they would recommend a relaxation.

Ministers say they are following the science. They are of course following a few prominent government scientists, who speak for one version of the science. The science on the pandemic is fortunately changing, as scientists work hard to understand the disease and remedies better, and as they study the pattern of infection worldwide. There are also various divisions of opinion over what treatments work or work best, over vaccines and how much and how often they have to be administered to an individual, over what the rate of spread may be at any given time and how best to conclude someone died of CV 19 rather than other complex conditions that many elderly people also suffer from.

Ministers need to offer us guidance on how we get out of this latest long lock down. Either they need to show us mass vaccination is the promised game changer and they will relax as soon as all the vulnerable who wish have been jabbed, or they need to come up with a plan for us to live alongside the virus better if vaccination is not going to ban it.

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## [Tax rises are the last thing the UK needs this year](#)

Government actions designed to limit the spread of the virus and reduce the burden on the NHS have done great damage to jobs, business and output. Knowing they would the government rightly made generous provision to subsidise employment, offer grants and loans to businesses, and increased benefits to people to sustain demand. This naturally led to colossal borrowing by the state and to the effective nationalisation of large parts of the economy from private hospitals to the railways.

The Treasury now rightly says we cannot go on with the excessive borrowing and very high levels of state spending needed during lock down. They should add that state borrowing will fall rapidly as soon as lock down is removed and a decent economic recovery is allowed and encouraged. A large number of people who have kept their better paid jobs and been on full pay throughout the last year have money to spend as soon as they are allowed to buy services that entail face to face encounters. Many businesses will soon be back with revenue in the tills and staff on overtime again. As this happens so the amount the state spends on benefits, grants, loans and cushioning of the lockdown diminishes. So also tax revenue soars as people pay VAT on services again, income tax on earnings and transaction taxes.

The last thing we need is new taxes or rises in tax rates. In order to promote recovery the Treasury should be thinking about lower rates and fewer taxes. We need a big expansion of business capacity. The danger is we lose a generation of entrepreneurs, of people working for themselves or running small businesses, as a result of the lockdowns. The most energetic will of course flourish again, but we need to create conditions where the average, the not so highly motivated, those worried about risk taking are persuaded enterprise is for them and the odds are favourable to setting up and running a successful business.

The only way to get the deficit down to sensible levels and to slash additional borrowing is to promote a strong and rapid recovery. We need to be doing that from early in the new financial year, so that we just put behind us one year of huge state borrowings. Tax rises will delay and impede recovery, and will put off that new generation of businesses and self employed we will badly need to lead us out of additional debt.

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## **The U.K. needs to earn its living**

The answers I have been getting from DEFRA are worrying. They show no sense of urgency to use our new freedoms to promote more growing and rearing home grown food. They are not standing up for U.K. interests in interpreting the Trade Agreement with the EU. They are not bringing forward early plans to raise our fishing capacity or to expand our market gardening areas.

The thrust of policy seems to be to wilding our landscape instead of farming it better. There are too many proposed grants for so called environmental gains and not enough for food production. Many of us want to slash the food miles, employ more U.K. people and enjoy more good U.K. produced food. That means extending the season for vegetables and soft fruit with more glasshouses and polytunnels. It means working with the food manufacturing industry to put more U.K. produce into imaginative meals and good recipes for ready meals. It means strong U.K. branding.

I see some of the supermarkets understand U.K. consumer wishes. Many fresh food items have the Union flag on. None carry the EU, Spanish or Dutch flags. Let's go one step further and have a farming policy which delivers us more great British food. The world does not owe us a living and it is not good to be so dependent on overseas supply of things we can grow for ourselves.

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# A vaccination update from West Berkshire

The vaccination programme is being delivered by the NHS but we retain a keen interest in how the roll out is progressing locally. We were pleased to be joined at Monday's Local Outbreak Engagement Board Dr Abid Irfan from the Berkshire West Clinical Commissioning Group and to hear his update on the progress made so far.

We know what residents are most interested in is what is happening in their community – and when they and those they care about will get their doses.

Whilst there is monumental effort by the NHS nationally to distribute the vaccine, much of the hard work to get doses to residents is being done by local GP surgeries. They have been working collaboratively to set up local vaccination centres which they are running together, and with the support of our local Clinical Commissioning Group.

There are two local vaccination centres; one in Pangbourne, involving three GP local surgeries, and one in Newbury which is a larger site covering nine individual GPs surgeries. Until the end of January they will be vaccinating anyone over 80 as well as frontline health workers and social care workers. From there they will move on to the over-75s, and then the over 70s and those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

GP surgeries have worked really hard to get these vaccination centres up and running as quickly as possible. It has been great to read the praise for the centre staff from patients grateful to have received their vaccine. Although vaccinations are being delivered as quickly as possible it will take time to get to everyone – please be patient and wait for your GP to contact you about making an appointment.

The speed at which our NHS partners are working and the complexity in arranging a national vaccination programme means that along the way they will experience some logistical difficulties. This week Newbury Racecourse has come in for a little criticism for not allowing vaccinations to continue at their site on race days. The reality is that it would be challenging for the site to operate seven day a week due to the vaccine distribution process. GPs were aware of these operational issues before setting up the centre and they did so confident that they would still be able to reach their targets within timelines – even without doing on the odd few days.

Speaking of the vaccination centre, we have received several enquiries asking whether more trains can stop at the Newbury Racecourse station. We've asked the question of GWR, and are pleased to say that they have agreed to put on more trains. It will take a couple of weeks to implement, but we're grateful to them for their flexibility and delighted that local residents will have more sustainable travel options when journeying to get their vaccination.

Elsewhere we are ploughing on with our plans for new community testing facilities in the district. We are close to agreeing our first testing site for Newbury which should open next month and will allow testing for critical and key workers, as well as people involved in the management of local outbreaks. There will be a phased approach to those identified for testing and the relevant cohorts will be invited to join the testing programme over a series of weeks. Once that is up and running we will then be looking at additional sites in the east and west of the district, and potentially a mobile unit too. Testing to identify asymptomatic Covid carriers is important in managing the outbreak, and a potential release of the restrictions so we are working to get these open as quickly as we can. We'll keep you updated on this as our plans progress.

Away from the pandemic response, business as usual continues and this week we were thrilled to announce this year's Community Champion Awards. We haven't been able to do an awards ceremony this year but it shouldn't take anything away from this year's winners with the standard as high as ever. This year we introduced special categories in relation to coronavirus, in addition to our usual categories and it allowed us to recognise a broad spectrum of community-minded activities this year. There are far too many to mention here but do please take a look at the website and read about the incredible winners we've had this year.

We're continuing to look beyond the immediate demands of the pandemic to plan for the future and we have a number of important consultations closing in the next few weeks. These include the Newbury Town Centre Masterplan Study (which closes on 31 January), Local Plan Review 2037 (closes on 5 February) and the Minerals and Waste Plan (closes on 15 February). We have also started a consultation this week on our proposal for a new sports ground at Newbury Rugby Club. Each one is really important in helping us take into account local views as we look at how the district develops in the coming years. Whilst we all find ourselves confined to our homes please take a time to look at these documents and tell us what you think.

- For more information about vaccinations, including the number of people vaccinated as we receive the data, visit:

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/covid-vaccination>

- To find out more about the Community Champion Awards visit

<https://info.westberks.gov.uk/awardwinners>

Yours sincerely,  
Lynne Doherty  
Leader of the Council

Nick Carter  
Chief Executive