

First people to receive Oxford University/AstraZeneca Covid-19 vaccine today (4 January 2021)

The NHS is the first health service in the world to deploy the life-saving jab, which has been authorised by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) after meeting strict standards of safety, quality and effectiveness. It is the only approved vaccine which can be stored at fridge temperatures.

The Government has secured access to 100 million doses of the vaccine on behalf of the whole of the UK, crown dependencies and Overseas Territories.

More than half a million doses are available today, with tens of millions more to be delivered in the coming weeks and months once batches have been quality checked by the MHRA. More than 730 vaccination sites have already been established across the UK and hundreds more are opening this week to take the total to over 1,000, helping those who are most at risk from Covid-19 to access vaccines for free, regardless of where they live.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

I am delighted that today we are rolling out the Oxford vaccine – a testament to British science. This is a pivotal moment in our fight against this awful virus and I hope it provides renewed hope to everybody that the end of this pandemic is in sight.

Through its vaccine delivery plan the NHS is doing everything it can to vaccinate those most at risk as quickly as possible and we will rapidly accelerate our vaccination programme.

While the most vulnerable are immunised, I urge everybody to continue following the restrictions so we can keep cases down and protect our loved ones.

The first Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccinations will be delivered at hospitals for the first few days, as is standard practice, before the bulk of supplies are sent to hundreds of GP-led services and care homes later in the week. More than a million people in the UK have already been vaccinated with the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and its roll out will continue at pace.

The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine can be stored at fridge temperatures, between two to eight degrees, making it easier to distribute to care homes and other locations across the UK. The vaccines will be deployed through:

- hospital hubs for NHS and care staff and older patients to get vaccinated

- local community services with local teams and GPs already signing up to take part in the programme
- vaccination centres across the country, ensuring people can access a vaccine regardless of where they live

An army of current and former NHS staff have applied to become vaccinators, with tens of thousands having already completed their online training. These are being processed as quickly as possible and volunteer vaccinators will be deployed as more vaccine supplies become available. GPs and local vaccination services have been asked to ensure every care home resident in their local area is vaccinated by the end of January.

The MHRA, Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and the four UK Chief Medical Officers agreed to delay the gap between the first and second dose of vaccines to protect the greatest number of people in the shortest amount of time.

In line with the recommendations of the JCVI, the vaccine will be rolled out to the priority groups including care home residents and staff, people over 80 and health and care workers, then to the rest of the population in order of age and risk, including those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

Background

There are more than 730 vaccination sites across the UK.

Up to 100 more hospital sites are due to come online in England this week, subject to final assurance checks. There are also another 180 GP-led services which are due to come online this week.

The following hospitals in England will start delivering the vaccine today ahead of the rollout to hundreds of GP-led services later in the week:

- Royal Free Hospital London NHS Foundation Trust
- Brighton and Sussex University Hospitals NHS Trust
- Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust
- Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
- University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust
- George Eliot Hospital NHS Trust