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## WEEKLY NEWSLETTER – 23rd February 2021

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### EXTRAORDINARY COVID-19 UPDATE

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#### 1. Vaccinating cohorts 5 and 6

Practice sites are now already vaccinating an expanded group of clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) people (cohort 6) and many will also be vaccinating those in cohort 5 (people aged 65 and over) who have chosen to receive their vaccination locally.

The NHSE/I letter [Vaccination of JCVI cohorts 5-6 and additional funding for vaccination in residential settings](#) outlines the next stage of the vaccination programme. It also contains information about an additional payment of £10 on top of the Item of Service fee for vaccinations given to all those in residential settings, such as care homes for people with learning disabilities or mental health problems, or hostel/hotel accommodation for the homeless, where it would not be possible for these patients to attend vaccination sites.

Vaccination sites are initially being asked to focus on the expanded group of cohort 6, which now includes those who will have been identified as at higher risk from COVID-19 using a new population risk assessment tool ([Q-COVID](#)) and if they are not already on the Shielding List they will be automatically added, so there is no need for practices to do anything. You can read the [NHSE/I letter to GPs](#) about this cohort and how they should be prioritised for vaccination and how they will be added to the Shielded Patient List.

[JCVI priority Cohort 6](#) includes ‘all individuals aged 16 years to 64 years with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality’. This also includes those who are in receipt of a carer’s allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill. Cohort 6 is further defined in the newly updated [Green Book Chapter 14a](#) as “Adults aged 16 to 65 years in an at-risk group”.

Those in cohort 5 (those aged 65-69) will receive an invitation from the national booking service (NBS) to attend a local vaccination centre or community pharmacy setting. PCN sites may though still vaccinate patients in this cohort and be paid for doing so should a patient request an appointment.



## 2. COVID-19 Population Risk Assessment – Patient Queries

We have been informed that following the introduction of the new COVID-19 Population Risk Assessment tool many practices have been receiving contact from patients (and staff members) who have now been identified as being at highest risk from COVID-19 following receipt of a letter advising them they have been added to the Shielding List.

This issue was raised with the BMA and although the letter clearly states, on the insistence of the BMA, that patients do not need to contact their GP, anxious patients will and are doing so. Considering this the BMA have asked whether modifications can be made to any future letters sent.

There is no requirement for patients to shield if they don't want to. So, if patients receive this letter they could, if they wanted to, continue to work as they have been doing.

The QCovid system has been extensively tested as part of the development, and one of the reasons it is only now available. You could direct patients (or staff members) to this page [COVID-19 Population Risk Assessment - NHS Digital](#) which has a lot of detail about the development and it also has at the top information about how patients can get more information if the page does not answer their questions: [If you have a staff member or member of the public with a question about COVID-19 Population Risk Assessment that is not answered here, please email \[risk.strat.spl@nhs.net\]\(mailto:risk.strat.spl@nhs.net\).](#)

## 3. COVID-19 Population Risk Assessment – Gestational Diabetes

In light of several queries regarding patients who have previously been diagnosed with Gestational Diabetes who have now been identified as being at highest risk from COVID-19, NHS Digital has now published specific guidance on gestational diabetes [COVID-19 Population Risk Assessment - NHS Digital](#) under the metabolic, renal and liver conditions tab.

*Diabetes is an important risk factor for COVID-19. To ensure all relevant people with diabetes are protected appropriately, it has been included in the COVID-19 risk assessment.*

*Some women with previous gestational diabetes have been identified by the QCovid model as being at high risk. This will be appropriate for many as the model performs an individual assessment based on a wide range of risk factors and considers an individual's risk in comparison to others of the same age and sex.*

*However, because the risk assessment is based on routinely coded data from multiple systems some women may have been identified as having diabetes when in fact, they had gestational diabetes. Others may have incomplete data in which case the risk tool may have defaulted, on a precautionary basis, to a higher level of risk for that category and this may influence the overall assessment results.*

*QCovid is a 'living' model with a commitment for the population risk assessment approach to be refined and updated for increased precision as new information becomes available. Active review is underway and further information will be communicated as soon as it is available.*

*Importantly, women with previous gestational diabetes have an increased risk of developing Type 2 diabetes (which would put them at higher risk from COVID-19) and they should continue to undergo the recommended annual checks for this.*



#### **4. COVID vaccination for healthcare workers**

To support healthcare workers and community based social care workers in priority group 2 to receive their COVID vaccination, you now have the option to book your vaccination appointments in a vaccination centre or community pharmacy through the [NHS COVID-19 vaccination booking service](#).

You should try booking online first but if this is not possible, you can phone 119 free of charge, 7am to 11pm, seven days a week. As part of the booking process, eligible staff need to self-declare that they are a health or social care worker. You will be able to book this way for a limited period, until 28 February. At your appointment, you will be asked to verbally declare that you are a health or social care worker, the type of role/work you do and the name of your employer/ locum agency. You should also bring ID/proof of employment such as a staff ID badge, a recent payslip or recent letter/email from your employer (dated within the last three months) or a letter of confirmation of locum status from your locum agency.

If you are a self-employed locum, some evidence of being paid for the provision of frontline, patient-facing services, along with photo ID, should be provided.

#### **5. National pool of Steward Volunteers**

A national pool of Steward Volunteers is available to support non-clinical tasks at vaccination sites, including PCN and community pharmacy sites. These are ready-to-use, unpaid volunteers who are managed, trained, and paid expenses by the NHS volunteer responder's programme. Steward Volunteers can undertake any tasks which support the smooth running of vaccination sites and would not normally be filled by paid staff. These include managing queues, greeting, and directing people, monitoring numbers, and overseeing social distancing measures. Primary care sites can access these volunteers by request via their lead employer and volunteers will be provided free of charge to local sites. The maximum shift length is six hours. Read more [here](#).

#### **6. How to use a pulse oximeter at home – patient video launched**

NHSX has launched a new [video](#) on how patients should use a pulse oximeter and track results. This is led by Dr Matt Inada-Kim, the clinical champion for Covid Oximetry @Home and National Clinical Director - infection, antimicrobial resistance (AMR) and deterioration at NHS England and NHS Improvement.

Please see the recently published [case study about how pulse oximetry is supporting general practice](#) in the response to the coronavirus pandemic.



## **7. Infection prevention update**

Many healthcare staff have now received a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, reducing the chance of them becoming seriously ill. This does not mean that there can be any relaxation in infection prevention practices, and the national guidance should continue to be followed. COVID-19 rates are improving, but remain high, and it is still important to help stop the spread.

No vaccine is completely effective, and it will take a few weeks for your body to build up protection. Moreover, it is unclear whether having the vaccination prevents you from passing COVID-19 on to others; so, you will still need to follow the guidance in your workplace, including wearing the correct personal protection equipment and taking part in any screening programmes.

To continue to protect yourself, your patients, your family, friends and colleagues, you should follow the general advice at work, at home and when you are out and about:

practise social distancing

wear a face mask

wash your hands carefully and frequently

follow the current guidance - [www.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.gov.uk/coronavirus)

## **8. Retired doctors – return to practice to support the pandemic effort**

Given the intensity of current workload pressures and the mounting backlog of care exacerbated by COVID-19 in the NHS, the BMA has recently updated its online guidance for doctors considering or wishing to [return to clinical practice](#) in the short, medium or long term, and for those wishing to specifically [support the vaccination programme](#). This follows consultation with NHSE/I and NHS Professionals.

The NHS is still seeking registered healthcare workers and clinical supervisors for the programme. Doctors can either return to work through the national routes, e.g., NHS Professionals vaccination programme recruitment drive or the GP refresher scheme, or they can approach local employers, e.g., GP practices, primary care networks or their local Integrated Care System lead (usually a hospital / trust).

[The BMA would be glad to hear from and support members or LMCs](#) who know of application issues or delays, as they can work with stakeholders to overcome them as swiftly as possible.



## 9. Long COVID

Last week, the BMA joined with 65 MPs and 7 Peers from 7 parties in a call for a compensation scheme for healthcare workers suffering with long-Covid. 65 MPs and 7 peers signed a letter to the Prime Minister urging the Government to launch a compensation scheme for frontline and key workers living with Covid-19. The story ran as an exclusive on BBC Breakfast on 18.02.2021 and RB chair Dr Helena McKeown was interviewed live – with clips used on the BBC throughout the day. The story was then additionally reported by [BBC News online](#), the [Mirror](#), the [Daily Mail](#), the [Guardian](#) and across regional outlets. BMA deputy council chair Dr David Wrigley was interviewed on the BBC News Channel and the appeared on various BBC regional radio stations' drivetime shows, including BBC Bristol, Berkshire, Lancashire, and Cumbria. Dr Christine Clayton, BMA south east coast regional council chair, appeared on BBC Radio Kent.

**Please note that the LMC are unable to accept calls or hold communications with patients, we are GP representatives, and we would respectfully ask that Practices do not advise patients to contact us. Could we also remind Practices that any copies of patient related correspondence MUST be anonymised as the LMC can not accept patient identifiable data.**

**Please note our office contact times remain 10:00-16:00 and any queries on the day should be directed to [birmingham.lmc@nhs.net](mailto:birmingham.lmc@nhs.net) as we are currently remote working so would be grateful if all contact were made via the nhs.net email.**

### Helpful Links:

**BMA COVID-19: toolkit for GPs and GP practices** <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/gp-practices/covid-19-toolkit-for-gps-and-gp-practices> Comprehensive guidance for GPs, partners, and practice managers to manage employment and contractual issues and service provision during the coronavirus pandemic.

**GOVERNMENT WEBSITE:** <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> for recent and upcoming changes, guidance & support.

**NHS ENGLAND:** <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/implementing-phase-3-of-the-nhs-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>