

Covid Vaccination Update

All of the team at Henfield Medical Practice appreciate the stress and difficulty that our patients are experiencing going into yet another lockdown, with local rates of Covid being now higher than the national average. Vaccination has been a significant hope for us all and we wanted to update you on the local situation.

The Government's strategy has so far been for vaccines to be given in hospitals, "mass vaccination sites" (such as the Brighton Centre) and in GP Hubs. Each local group of GP surgeries (Primary Care Networks, or PCNs) had to choose one site to be the local Hub, and The Glebe Surgery in Storrington was nominated for our area. This was largely due to the logistics of delivering the Pfizer vaccine, which is very difficult to transport once defrosted, and initially was only being delivered in batches of 975 vaccines.

The team at The Glebe (including many patient volunteers) has been working flat out to give the Pfizer vaccine, but have no control over when, and how much of, the vaccine is delivered to them. Clinics have had to be set up at very short notice, and then rearranged when the vaccine delivery was delayed. All in all, it has been a huge challenge, but Henfield patients are being invited for the vaccine, and so far 193 have had it.

There is a full batch of the vaccine due to be delivered to Storrington on 13th January, and some more of our over-80 year old patients will be invited to have their vaccine on the three days afterwards. Storrington are also vaccinating patients from Billingshurst and Steyning, so each delivery will be shared evenly. Plans are in place for care home residents and staff to be able to have their vaccines this coming weekend.

The Government has set out a strict order in which they require patients to be vaccinated, with the over-80 age group and care homes being given initially. Once all of the over-80s have been offered the vaccine, the over-75s will be invited next, and so on. There is currently very little flexibility in this – in a household where there are mixed ages, patients won't all be able to have the vaccine at the same time.

We have been told that the vaccine will arrive on a weekly basis for the rest of January, but neither we nor The Glebe have control over this. Some patients may be invited to have their vaccine in the local hospital or in other places. After the end of January, vaccine supply should improve significantly and the process of inviting patient should speed up.

Everyone has somewhat pinned their hopes on the Oxford Astrazeneca vaccine being made available to GP surgeries, as we hope that might allow us the flexibility of giving the vaccine locally in Henfield, in a similar way to our 'flu clinics. This vaccine only gained approval last week, and has so far been distributed to hospitals in order to test it out. To date, the Government has said that the GP Hubs will have no choice about which of the vaccines will be delivered, and so there are currently no concrete plans to give the vaccine locally in Henfield. We will continue to push for access to supplies of this vaccine for our patients in Henfield, as we feel that it will make all the difference to being able to give it more quickly and flexibly.

On a final note, our receptionists and admin team have been receiving large numbers of telephone calls from patients asking when they might be invited for vaccination, and also asking if they might be given priority due to special circumstances. This is a particularly busy time in General Practice, and although we appreciate everyone is anxious to be vaccinated, these calls are taking staff away from other work.

Our staff have no control over vaccine delivery, and will not know when the next batch is due to be dropped off in Storrington. The vaccination schedule as set out by the Government will dictate when patients will be invited, which will be on a one-by-one basis. No-one eligible for it should be left out, so we would be grateful for your patience. Please wait for one of the admin team from Henfield or Storrington to call you.

Keep safe and we will keep you informed of new developments.

Dr Crawford Clarke

Henfield Medical Practice

Please see the link explaining the order of patients being vaccinated -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-why-you-are-being-asked-to-wait/why-you-have-to-wait-for-your-covid-19-vaccine?priority-taxon=774cee22-d896-44c1-a611-e3109cce8eae>