



2nd February 2021

Mr Stephen Donnelly TD
Minister for Health
Department of Health
Miesian Plaza
50-58 Lower Baggot Street
Dublin 2

Via email to Private Secretary to the Minister for Health

Dear Minister

As you will be aware, on January 29th the European Commission granted a conditional marketing authorisation for COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca in people from 18 years of age, based on a recommendation from the European Medicines Agency (EMA). Combined results from four clinical trials demonstrated that COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca was safe and effective at preventing COVID-19 in people from 18 years of age. The efficacy of the vaccine calculated on the basis of results from two of those trials is 59.5%. The EMA noted in its opinion that most of the participants in these studies were between 18 and 55 years old, and that currently there was not enough data available to calculate the efficacy of the vaccine in older participants. Notwithstanding, the EMA considered that protection with the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca is expected in those above 55 years, given that an immune response is seen in this age group and based on experience from other vaccines.

On 29th January, I requested that the National Immunisation Advisory Committee (NIAC) consider the data published by the EMA in relation to the authorisation of the COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca and provide any advice it may deem appropriate to the ongoing delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination programme, in respect of the following issues:

1. the use of the vaccine in older adults; and
2. the vaccine's dosing schedule.

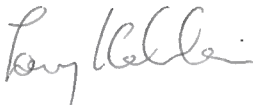
I received advice from NIAC yesterday (see enclosed) in which they recommend that in line with the conditional marketing authorisation granted, all currently authorised COVID-19 vaccines can be used in adults of all ages, including those aged 70 years and older. The NIAC also offered advice with regard to the dosing schedule for COVID-19 Vaccine AstraZeneca and recommended an interval of 4-6 weeks for those aged 65 years and older and an interval of 4-12 weeks for those aged less than 65 years of age. The NIAC state that given the high rates of community transmission, the best vaccine to administer to the older population is the one which can be soonest administered. Furthermore, they recommend, where practicable and timely, that those aged 70 years and older should be given mRNA vaccines, as these vaccines have a higher reported overall efficacy which makes them preferable for use in those at highest risk of adverse outcomes.

The main objective of the vaccination strategy is to prevent morbidity and mortality. International and national data indicate that those aged 70 and older are at significantly higher risk of hospitalisation and mortality. Due to the superior efficacy demonstrated by mRNA vaccines, including in older persons (albeit the data is limited), and in recognition of their particular vulnerability in terms of their increased risk of death and serious disease if they contract SARS-CoV-2, it is recommended that mRNA vaccines be administered to all those over 70 years in order to provide the highest level of protection available to this population. In addition, those aged over 65 years residing or working in long-term residential care facilities who have yet to receive their first dose of vaccine, should also receive an mRNA vaccine based on their increased risk of mortality/morbidity and increased risk of contracting the virus in the congregated settings in which they reside/work.

Assurance should be provided by the HSE that vaccine supplies will be sufficient to progress this important objective in a timely fashion as set out in recommendation 2 of the NIAC advice. The supply and availability of all authorised COVID-19 vaccines will need to be kept under constant review by the HSE to ensure the objective remains achievable. The HSE must ensure that the deployment of mRNA vaccines to this older cohort is equitable.

The policy advice articulated above in relation to vaccination of those older than 70 years with mRNA vaccines will be updated as required, based on any further NIAC advice.

Yours sincerely



Dr Tony Holohan
Chief Medical Officer
Chair of the COVID-19 National Public Health Emergency Team

cc. Ms Elizabeth Canavan, Department of the Taoiseach and Chair of the Senior Officials Group for COVID-19

Designated Public Official under Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015