Minister for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy welcomes commencement of the COVID-19 vaccination programme for medically vulnerable people in homeless services

From Department of Health

Published on 6 May 2021

Last updated on 7 May 2021

The Minister of State for Public Health, Wellbeing and the National Drugs Strategy, Frank Feighan TD, has welcomed the commencement of the COVID-19 vaccination programme for medically vulnerable people living in homeless services in Dublin city.

Today, the Minister attended the temporary vaccination clinic set up by the HSE in Dublin city centre. The clinic will provide vaccination for 700 medically vulnerable people living in homeless services over the next two weeks, with approximately 350 people due to receive the vaccine this week alone.

This is the initial phase of the vaccination programme for socially excluded groups who have been prioritised by NIAC (National Immunisation Advisory Committee) as having significantly increased risk of illness from COVID-19. These include people who are homeless and members of the Traveller and Roma communities. The HSE has established a national operational working group to develop and implement a vaccination pathway for these groups using bespoke and targeted vaccination clinics.

Minister Feighan said:

"This is a landmark day in the COVID-19 vaccination programme as the HSE commences the inoculation of medically vulnerable people in homeless services. Vaccination of this group demonstrates the value the government places on equity and inclusion in the public health service."

Minister Feighan paid tribute to the frontline health care workers who have protected medically vulnerable people in homeless services during COVID-19:

"The work of the Dublin COVID-19 Homeless Response Team, the HSE, the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive and voluntary service providers have greatly minimised the potentially devastating impact of COVID-19 on this group. Today, they are seeing the rewards for their efforts with the vaccination of their clients. I also want to thank the staff administering the vaccine and the Salvation Army for hosting this clinic."
"I want to congratulate the individuals attending the clinic, who have had to endure personal sacrifices to remain safe during COVID-19. Today, they will begin to return to social activities. Their return to society will be a positive one due to the health supports they have received during COVID-19. One of the benefits of the pandemic is that we have found new ways to provide health services for people who are homeless. These are backed up by an additional investment of €11m in health services for people who are homeless during COVID-19 though the HSE national service plan 2021."

The vaccination programme for people who are medically vulnerable in homeless services is being delivered in bespoke ways:

- it is using the one-shot Janssen vaccine, which is new to Ireland
- the HSE is providing transport to and from the vaccination clinic
- there is an active communications plan to encourage and support people to take up the vaccine

Minister Feighan said:

"The rollout of the vaccination programme to all those in prioritised socially excluded groups will ultimately benefit over 40,000 individuals. The delivery of the programme takes into account the unique circumstances affecting these groups, including difficulties some may have in accessing and engaging with health services. Other at-risk groups, such as residents in direct provision and people attending drug treatment services, will benefit from this targeted approach in due course.

"The COVID-19 vaccination programme is well advanced and thanks to the extraordinary efforts of the Irish people, there has been a marked improvement in the incidence of the virus in the community. The programme is a key enabler to the reopening of society and the economy, and is well underway with over 30% of the eligible population with at least one dose."

**Notes**

The medically vulnerable people in homeless services have an underlying condition that puts them at very high or high risk of severe disease and death from COVID-19.

The NIAC advice is that people who are homeless or are members of the Traveller or Roma communities can be vaccinated in parallel with the general population in group 9.

The NIAC advice is that the Janssen one shot vaccine is appropriate for vulnerable groups in younger age groups (under 50 years), where repeat attendance may be problematic.

The Dublin COVID-19 homeless response team is led by the HSE, with Dr Austin O’Carroll as the clinical lead. It is supported by the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive, voluntary homeless and drug service providers and Safetynet Primary Care.

The team provides targeted services to mitigate and manage the impact of COVID-19 on this uniquely vulnerable population, which include:
• medically staffed isolation units for confirmed and suspected positive cases and close contacts of positive cases managed by Peter McVerry Trust
• shielding units for people who were medically assessed as acutely vulnerable to contracting COVID-19 run by Focus, DePaul and Crosscare
• dedicated Homeless COVID Response Team to organise tracking, tracing and isolating supported by Ana Liffey Drug Project
• mobile testing supports to allow for on-site and rapid antigen testing where required carried out by Safetynet Primary Care