CMO’S REASSURE GPs ABOUT 12 WEEK COVID-19 VACCINE GAP

The UK's CMOs have sought to reassure doctors about their decision to back a 12-week gap between COVID-19 vaccines as the vaccination programme shifts to providing as many people in at-risk groups as possible with a first dose of either the Pfizer/BioNTech or Oxford/AstraZeneca jabs.

 A [letter to the profession on 31 December](https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cas.mhra.gov.uk%2FViewandAcknowledgment%2FViewAlert.aspx%3FAlertID%3D103132&data=04%7C01%7C%7C976f6497e1cd41eb191308d8b0b80997%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C637453651813133040%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=7zD1y%2FAyfA5Lsu2smKwia4yDVL7q0obvfDo2TJaNr6M%3D&reserved=0) aimed to set out the 'scientific and public health rationale' for changing the dosing schedule and included a new evidence statement from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The four CMOs said that they were 'confident that based on publicly available data as well as data available to the JCVI that the first dose of either Pfizer or AstraZeneca vaccine provides substantial protection within 2-3 weeks of vaccination for clinical disease, and in particular severe COVID disease'.

'In terms of protecting priority groups, a model where we can vaccinate twice the number of people in the next 2-3 months is obviously much more preferable in public health terms than one where we vaccinate half the number but with only slightly greater protection,' the letter said.

The [new evidence statement from the JCVI](https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fapp.box.com%2Fs%2Fuwwn2dv4o2d0ena726gf4403f3p2acnu&data=04%7C01%7C%7C976f6497e1cd41eb191308d8b0b80997%7C84df9e7fe9f640afb435aaaaaaaaaaaa%7C1%7C0%7C637453651813143035%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=KJ8YJa8m3UCdr2QR6GLXWIQLwdiEnPKOExjt9lvdZf8%3D&reserved=0) said that short-term efficacy was around 90% for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and 70% for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

 The statement said that, taking into account the seven days after the Pfizer second dose was administered when it would not be expected to provide additional protection, its phase 3 trial showed vaccine efficacy of about 90% 'from two weeks after the first dose and for the following two weeks'.

'It does not indicate [efficacy] beyond this time point as participants had received a second dose,' the JCVI added.

Protection from a single dose of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine was assessed in an exploratory analysis, which showed that 'increased immunogenicity was associated with a longer dose interval'.

'Efficacy is currently demonstrated with more certainty for dose intervals from 8 to 12 weeks. Data for intervals longer than 12 weeks are limited,' the JCVI said.

Last week Pfizer issued a statement saying that its vaccine's safety and efficacy had not been evaluated on any dosing schedule other than 21 days between jabs, adding that 'there are no data to demonstrate that protection after the first dose is sustained after 21 days'.

However, the JCVI highlighted that the Moderna vaccine, which like the Pfizer jab is based on mRNA technology, does have data to support high efficacy up to '108 days after the first dose'.

The JCVI said: 'There is currently no strong evidence to expect that the immune response from the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine would differ substantially from the AstraZeneca and Moderna vaccines.'

GPs prepare huge COVID-19 vaccine drive as first patients receive Oxford jab

4 January 2021

GP-led sites across the UK will deliver hundreds of thousands of doses of COVID-19 vaccine this week as rollout of the Oxford/Astra Zeneca vaccine began.

 Around 1,000 vaccination sites are expected to be operational in England by the end of the week beginning 4 January.

 NHS England has confirmed that 'more than 700 sites' - predominantly local, GP-led vaccination centres - have begun delivering doses of COVID-19 vaccine. A further 180 GP sites and 100 more hospital hubs are expected to join the vaccination drive this week.

The DHSC has confirmed that 500,000 doses of the Oxford vaccine are available to be administered this week - and the *BBC* has reported that a similar number of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine are also ready for rollout this week.

This suggests that the NHS could come close to doubling the 1m doses of vaccine administered by the end of 2020 by the end of the first full week of 2021.

The Government has said that more than one in five of England's 2.9m patients aged over 80 have now received a first dose of COVID-19 vaccine.