

**Joint Committee on Health, 29 January 2021**  
**Update on the Rollout of the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme**

**Opening Remarks by Mr. Fergal Goodman, Assistant Secretary, Health Protection Division,  
Department of Health**

Good morning Chairman and members, colleagues,

I welcome the opportunity to update you on the rollout of the COVID19 vaccination programme on behalf of the Department of Health, alongside colleagues from the HSE and the High-Level Taskforce on COVID19 Vaccination.

We are now four weeks into the rollout of the largest vaccination programme in the history of the State. The National COVID-19 Vaccination Strategy prepared by the High-Level Taskforce and agreed by Government has set out a clear plan and strategy for us to follow.

The priority from the start of this programme has been to first vaccinate and therefore protect the most vulnerable amongst us; those who are most likely to have a poor outcome if they contract the virus. To this end, the majority of residents and staff in Long Term Care Facilities have already received their first vaccine dose. This week the programme has expanded to residents of disability and mental health congregated settings.

Shortly vaccination will begin for the over 70s in the third allocation group, beginning with those who are 85 and older.

Of the 161,500 vaccines administered up to Wednesday 27 January 71,600 have been administered in Long Term Care Facilities and a further 89,900 have gone to frontline Healthcare Workers.

The delivery of the vaccination programme has not been without challenges. I am sure you are all aware of the issues surrounding the AstraZeneca vaccine and delivery of the agreed volume of doses to European member states. Later today the European Medicines Agency will provide their recommendation on AstraZeneca's application for conditional marketing authorisation.

**The Communications Strategy**

I know the Committee has a particular interest today in the Communications Strategy for the rollout of the vaccination programme. I'm joined by my colleague Elizabeth Headon, who is the Department's Lead on communications on the vaccination programme and is working closely with the HSE and other stakeholders.

Communications is a very important element in the vaccination programme. It is crucial for the public to have confidence in, and understanding of, the vaccines themselves, to easily access accurate information, to receive relevant details about when, where and how they will receive their vaccination, and to feel confident in the administration of the programme.

We have provided an ancillary report outlining the press and broadcast advertising to date, as well as social media and news coverage of the vaccination programme, which I hope you will find useful.

There are high levels of engagement from the public on our communications channels with 860,000 visits to [gov.ie/covid19vaccine](https://gov.ie/covid19vaccine) and 414,000 visits to [hse.ie/covid-19-vaccine](https://hse.ie/covid-19-vaccine) since they launched mid-December and extremely high social media engagement, reaching 2.5 million.

Research carried out weekly for the Department of Health has demonstrated growing public confidence in and demand for Covid-19 vaccination. Most recently, 83% of Irish adults said they would definitely or probably get the Covid-19 vaccine, with almost 70% saying they will definitely get it, up from 45% in November.

This demand brings its own challenges. There is a great interest in and demand for information about the vaccination programme, and in these early stages, while supply remains a significant and variable constraint, uncertainties about delivery schedules affect how much detail can be provided at an individual, personal level. The HSE has developed a public information campaign which will begin this weekend, and colleagues from the HSE may be able to provide more details on that.

I will be pleased to provide you with further information on these topics this morning.

Thank you.