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Carers UK welcomes new JCVI advice which includes unpaid carers in the vaccination priority list

31 December 2020

Carers UK has welcomed the inclusion of unpaid carers in the publication of new COVID vaccination advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) published yesterday (30.12.2020). This advice recommends that carers who are in receipt of Carer's Allowance or are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer contracted COVID should be included in Priority 6 alongside people with underlying conditions.

When Government published the priority list for the vaccination on 2 December, carers were missing despite the Green Book, which is commonly used as the standard advice for vaccination, stating that they should be included. Carers UK has been calling for unpaid carers to be included urgently in the priority list. Thousands of carers had told Carers UK this was one of their highest priorities to help them through the pandemic.

Helen Walker, Chief Executive, Carers UK said, "We are relieved that this has been rectified and that unpaid carers have been included in the priority list. The pandemic has placed extreme stress on carers, with our research finding 81% of unpaid carers taking on even more care and many unable to take a break. Every day carers have faced the fear of passing on the virus to their loved one whom they care for, or being unable to care and worry about there not being sufficient support for the person they care for. Having kept their loved one safe for so long, many are reaching breaking point."

"The vaccine will provide a lifeline for unpaid carers, reducing worry and fear as well as opening up the possibility of some carers accessing help for the first time in nearly a year."

"Now that the JCVI advice has been published, it is vital that there are clear references to unpaid carers in all DHSC, NHS and Government communications relating to the priority list. Since the first advice came out we have been flooded with queries and concerns from carers saying they had been overlooked and they've felt devastated. Government now has an opportunity to ensure that unpaid carers are rightly recognised and ensure that communications about roll-out plans clearly refer to unpaid carers."

Carers UK also welcomes the JCVI guidance that there should be some flexibility in order to minimise wastage of any vaccine. Within this approach, Carers UK recommends that unpaid carers are vaccinated at the same time as the person they care for if they are accompanying the person they care for to an appointment. This would help to achieve the latest JCVI advice on widespread vaccination, as well as providing earlier reassurance for carers and fewer trips to get vaccinated for each person they care for as well as themselves.

References to the JCVI guidance published on 30 December are as follows:

In the section, Persons with Underlying Conditions, “Other groups at higher risk, including those who are in receipt of a carer’s allowance, or those who are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer falls ill, should also be offered vaccination alongside these groups.

Individuals within these risk groups who are clinically extremely vulnerable are discussed separately (see above). Further advice on risk groups, including clear definitions, are set out in the Green Book - Immunisation Against Infectious Disease

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/immunisation-against-infectious-disease-the-green-book>).

The updated JCVI priority list states: Priority 6 includes people aged 16 to 64 with underlying health conditions which put them at higher risk of serious disease and mortality and refers to footnote 3, which clearly includes unpaid carers. The footnote is published below.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation-advice-on-priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-30-december-2020#fn:3>

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation-advice-on-priority-groups-for-covid-19-vaccination-30-december-2020#fn:3>)

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