

# Call for pharmacists to be utilised to stop vaccine targets being missed

**5 March 2021:** As the HSE struggles to meet its COVID-19 vaccine campaign targets, the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) has urged the Minister for Health to boost vaccination capacity by immediately mobilising pharmacists. The IPU said there should be no further delays in enlisting pharmacists, who could potentially administer 10,000 or more vaccines a day.

Speaking about the vaccine rollout, IPU Secretary General Darragh O’Loughlin said, “Starting the roll-out of vaccinations to the general population last month was extremely positive. Unfortunately, the HSE has not so far been able to meet its modest targets of 100,000 vaccinations per week. While supply of vaccines has clearly been the main driver of this shortfall, capacity to administer vaccines will soon become a factor as supply improves and those targets increase.

“To avoid any further delays, we are calling for capacity to be increased by allowing pharmacists to start vaccinating using the AstraZeneca vaccine. Should the Johnson & Johnson vaccine be approved in the coming weeks, pharmacists should immediately be allocated supplies to commence vaccinating with this also.”

This approach would allow the creation of ‘two queues’ according to Mr O’Loughlin. “The GPs could continue their work vaccinating those aged over 70 and other vulnerable groups who require mRNA vaccines. Meanwhile pharmacists could commence vaccination of the other cohorts on the priority sequencing list, including those under 70 and key workers. The HSE has signalled its intent to start vaccinating at risk people aged over 16, and pharmacists would be ideally placed to support this function.

“Over half of the population live within one kilometre of a pharmacy and 85% live within 5km. Pharmacists provide a safe, effective and convenient vaccination service and have a proven track record of safely and successfully vaccinating people for years. There is no reason to constrain the country’s vaccination capacity by not mobilising pharmacists immediately.”

Darragh O’Loughlin concluded by calling for all pharmacy staff to be vaccinated as frontline healthcare workers without delay. “Many pharmacists have now received their first dose of vaccine, which is extremely positive. However, a community pharmacy requires a dedicated team in order to keep its doors open to patients and the public. All these dedicated staff are facing risks every day to ensure continued supply of medicine to those who need it. There should be no further delay in protecting these key workers.”

**ENDS**