

Postcode lottery could slowdown vaccine rollout



Pharmacists criticise inconsistent approach to prioritisation in vaccinating pharmacy staff

25 March 2021: The rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine in Ireland could be slowed down by a ‘postcode lottery’ that has developed within the HSE. This warning was issued by the Irish Pharmacy Union (IPU) who say there is an inconsistent approach to vaccinating priority groups, including pharmacy staff, in different parts of the country.

IPU Secretary General Darragh O’Loughlin outlined their concerns, saying, “While a number of pharmacy staff, as essential frontline workers, have now been vaccinated, there are inexplicably some areas of the country where there has been little, if any, vaccination of this key cohort. This is completely unacceptable and, if allowed to continue, could have a serious impact on the rollout of vaccinations in those areas.

“This has resulted in these essential workers being unfairly treated depending on where they are based,” which according to Mr O’Loughlin, “places each of them at increased levels of risk. Pharmacies have remained open from the earliest days of the lockdown, providing essential healthcare and ensuring the continued supply of medicines. The failure to protect all pharmacy staff is causing huge frustration and anxiety.

“Pharmacists will play a key role in the vaccine rollout, with this due to commence in the coming weeks. It is unreasonable to expect pharmacies to open their doors to vaccine clinics without having protected their staff first. Failing to protect pharmacy staff could therefore slowdown

vaccine administration to the wider population in these parts of the country.”

Mr O’Loughlin concluded by calling on Minister Stephen Donnelly to intervene to address this issue; “This unexplained discrepancy is placing healthcare workers at an unnecessary risk and it has the potential to undermine the pace of the vaccine rollout in affected areas. Resolving this should be a priority for the Minister and we hope he can bring clarity to the situation without delay.”

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