

21.07.19

13 Deputy C.S. Alves of St. Helier of the Minister for Health and Social Services regarding first vaccination appointments: (OQ.177/2021)

Will the Minister clarify the situation around booking first-time vaccination appointments, given they are currently only available up to 22nd July 2021, despite the booking form indicating that it should be possible to select a date up to 14 days from today and will he state whether there is a plan to stop or reduce first-dose appointments and, if so, until when people will be able to book their appointment?

The Deputy of St. Ouen (The Minister for Health and Social Services):

We receive a supply of vaccine each week from the U.K. Department of Health and Social Care. We are also sent details of predicted volumes for future supplies but this is a highly changeable estimate. The vaccination programme makes flexible operational plans based upon the estimates, although the programme only open booking slots once there is a guaranteed vaccine supply on the Island. The programme also needs to allocate and manage first and second doses between the limited supply that we receive; to achieve this we open appointment slots each week and review these daily. If necessary, the proportion of first and second-dose appointment slots is adjusted to maximise the opportunity for vaccination and to minimise any chance of wastage. There are still appointments available. We would encourage everyone to come forward and we have no plans to stop first-dose appointments at the current time.

4.13.1 Deputy C.S. Alves:

I thank the Minister for that answer. Can the Minister give us an indication of how much longer the facility up at Fort Regent will be used for vaccinations? I have obviously spoken to the Minister about this before, there are some people that are maybe waiting, holding back, I suppose, to have their first vaccination and are, therefore, worried that when they do decide to have it that that facility might not be there. Is there a plan for it to be available via G.P.s, for example?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I think the Deputy is thinking some time ahead. There are no immediate plans to close Fort Regent and indeed we are still considering what may be required in terms of a booster vaccination programme and it is possible that that might still be conducted at Fort Regent, although we do not yet know the criteria around the booster programme, so that is not certain as yet. We anticipate that even while a booster programme is being rolled out we will still make first doses and then subsequent second doses available for those who, for whatever reason, have not received it during the current vaccination programme. But I would encourage those people that the Deputy knows to book their appointment now because we have seen what good protection it offers. It offers 95 per cent protection against hospitalisation and 98 per cent protection against mortality. Even if people were to contract COVID, despite being vaccinated, it is a far less severe disease than not being vaccinated. I do not know the circumstances of the people mentioned but I would encourage them to book their appointments.

4.13.2 Deputy R.J. Ward:

Does the Minister have any concerns about vaccine supply over the coming immediate weeks and months, given the importance that it is for the strategy of the Government in dealing with the current significant rise in cases?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I have not been alerted to any concerns that suddenly the vaccine supply will dry up or be much reduced. It does change, depending on production of vaccine. But we are still confident that we will be able to vaccinate 80 per cent of all Islanders, to be fully vaccinated, by mid-August.

4.13.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

It is just to clarify on his previous answer. When the Minister said that the vaccine provides, I think he said 99 per cent or something like that, protection against hospitalisation, is that 99 per cent on top of what you would have if you were not vaccinated at all or is it 99 per cent generally?

The Deputy of St. Ouen:

I believe I used the figure 95 per cent protection against hospitalisation; if I did not I apologise. The figure is 95 per cent. The risk is reduced by 95 per cent, which I think has led to Dr. Muscat's quote in his press release recently that people who are unvaccinated have a 25 per cent greater ... sorry, maths was never my strong point. If you are unvaccinated you are 1 in 25 times more likely to be brought into hospital with COVID than if you are vaccinated, and that just shows the effectiveness of the programme.

4.13.4 Deputy M. Tadier:

I hope this is not too far from the original question, as it does arise from something the Minister has said. Can I ask when the risk of hospitalisation became the normal way to speak for a vaccine, when a vaccine is supposed to protect you from a virus or an illness in the first place and to talk about reducing your chances of hospitalisation seems to miss the point?

The Deputy Bailiff:

I think that is too far from the original question, Deputy Tadier. Final supplementary, Deputy Alves?

Deputy C.S. Alves:

No, that is fine. Thank you, Sir.