

Urgent that mental health centres receive Covid-19 vaccination schedule

Mental Health Commission: 26 of 66 facilities provide care for approximately 600 people aged 65 and over

Tuesday, January 5th: The Mental Health Commission (MHC) is not assured that a specific, timebound Covid-19 vaccination plan for residents and staff of mental health centres has been developed and shared with stakeholders.

The MHC has been in contact with individual mental health centres over the Christmas and New Year period as part of its ongoing remit to monitor, risk-rate and support units in the management and mitigation of the virus and many have confirmed to the MHC that they are still to receive a timeline from the Health Service Executive (HSE) for the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccine in their facility.

The MHC is particularly concerned that centres which provide services for residents aged 65 and over - a cohort of people that was included in the first allocation group for Covid-19 vaccinations published by the government prior to Christmas - have not received a vaccination schedule at this point.

In total, 26 of 66 approved mental health centres regulated by the MHC provide services, or are registered to provide services, to long-stay residents aged 65 and over. The MHC has been in direct contact on Monday, January 4th with 21 of those 26 centres, of which 19 confirmed that they have not received a vaccination schedule. There are approximately 600 dedicated beds for people aged 65 and over in these 26 long-stay approved centres.

“The MHC has been liaising with the HSE in relation to a vaccination programme for approved mental health centres for a number of weeks now,” said the Chief Executive of the Mental Health Commission, John Farrelly. “As of this morning, we still have not received assurance from the HSE as to when they plan to vaccinate residents and staff of mental health centres. This is despite the fact that nursing homes have already received a vaccination plan for their own residents and staff.

“We understand that there is a tiered vaccination programme and that this is gradually being rolled-out across the country, but we need the 26 older-age mental health centres prioritised and a schedule developed and shared as a matter of urgency with the MHC and the relevant centres,” added Mr Farrelly. “This plan needs to specify dates for vaccination. It also needs to be mindful that not all centres are aligned to acute hospitals or governed by the HSE. Following that, we need to ensure that the remaining 40 mental health centres are looked after, and those residents similarly protected.

“As we all know by this stage, people aged 65 and over in long-term care are extremely vulnerable and must be equitably prioritised for vaccination. Whether they reside in a nursing home, a mental health centre or another facility should not matter.

“Vaccination is a key mitigation to protect older persons with mental illness from Covid-19. We are all mindful following our experiences over the past 10 months of how quickly the virus can spread in residential settings and cause deaths. A specific, timebound and transparent plan is required to mitigate the risk for mental health centres. It will also assure and provide confidence to patients, staff and family members at this time of great uncertainty.”

The MHC has requested that the HSE provide a vaccination plan for mental health centres and is working with the Department of Health to ensure that the matter is raised as a priority with NPHE and the government.

The MHC is also looking for assurance that a vaccination schedule is being developed for more than 114 unregulated community mental health residences, which, along with the approved centres, the MHC has been risk-rating for Covid-19 progression since April 2020.

Ends