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# Public Health Wales statement on Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak

**This statement will be updated daily at midday**

**Statement: Updated at 12pm on Tuesday 5 January 2021**

Dr Giri Shankar, Incident Director for the Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak response at Public Health Wales, said:

"In the light of the serious situation in Wales, the Education Minister announced yesterday that all schools, colleges and independent schools should move to online learning until January 18<sup>th</sup>.

"Schools and colleges will remain open for children of critical workers and vulnerable learners, as well as for learners who need to complete essential exams or assessments. Welsh Government has indicated that Special Schools and PRU's should remain open if possible.

"With vaccinations for COVID-19 progressing, we welcome the start of the roll-out of the second Coronavirus vaccine (from Oxford/AstraZeneca) in Wales, with the first patients receiving their vaccine yesterday.

"The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has issued a short [statement](#) outlining the case for optimising the vaccine programme within the UK to achieve maximum short term impact.

"Vaccinating the adult population of Wales, to protect people from severe disease, is a significant task, and the vaccine will take time to reach everyone. The epidemiology of COVID-19 throughout the UK in late 2020 showed a clear need for rapid, high levels of vaccine uptake among vulnerable persons.

"The JCVI supports a two-dose vaccine schedule for the Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca vaccines. Given the data available, and evidence from the use of many other vaccines, Public Health Wales fully supports the JCVI advice to increase a maximum interval between the first and second doses of 12 weeks for both vaccines.

"It can be assumed that protection from the first dose will wane in the medium term, and the second dose will still be required to provide more durable protection. The JCVI advises initially prioritising delivery of the first vaccine dose as this is highly likely to have a greater public health impact in the short term and reduce the number of preventable deaths from COVID-19.

"Members of the public should not to phone your GP, pharmacy or hospital asking when they will get a vaccine. When someone is in one of the groups eligible for the vaccine, they will be invited to attend a dedicated clinic which will have been set up to ensure patient safety and that of the healthcare professionals.

"The effects of the vaccines may not be seen nationally for some time, and with Wales at alert level four we must continue to follow the advice on keeping Wales safe. Stay at home, meet only the people you live with, maintain social distancing, wash your hands regularly, and work from home if you can.

"As indicated by the Welsh Government, the new restrictions were brought forward due to the identification of a new more transmissible variant of Coronavirus. Public Health Wales has been working with UK partners to investigate and respond to this variant.

"It is normal for viruses to undergo mutations, and we expect this to happen. Although the variant is easier to transmit, there is currently no evidence that it is more severe.

"We are reminding people that all current guidance relating to Coronavirus continues to apply to the new variant, including advice relating to symptoms, social distancing, self-isolation, and vaccination.

"The new variant shows up as positive in Public Health Wales' existing Coronavirus tests, and people must continue to seek a test in the usual way if they develop Coronavirus symptoms.

"If you or a member of your household develop a cough, fever or change in sense of taste or smell, you must self-isolate immediately and book a free Coronavirus test, either by calling 119 or [by clicking here](#).

"If you are due to travel out of the UK, please be aware of the changing situation and keep an eye on the [FCO website](#) for up to date details.

"Public Health Wales urges everyone to follow the rules, to avoid transmission of Coronavirus and to protect everyone in our communities, including the most vulnerable."

***Datganiad: Diweddarwyd 12yh Dydd Mawrth 5 Ionawr 2021***

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