We are now beginning our coronavirus vaccination programme in our prisons.

We will be following the same priority list as the community so we will be vaccinating people based on age and clinically vulnerabilities. A clinical vulnerability is something which may put you at a higher risk if you catch coronavirus.

The vaccination will start with people who are over 80 and you will get a letter from the healthcare team with your appointment details when you become eligible. Please try to be patient and wait for the letter, we know it is frustrating but this will be the quickest way for you to get your vaccination.

We can’t tell you exactly when you will get your vaccine and we know that not giving you clear deadlines is probably frustrating. We will share any information about timings with you as soon as we have it.

Everyone must receive two doses of the vaccine for it to work properly and keep us safe. The doses will be given 12 weeks apart so that more people can be treated.

In the meantime you will already know that your prison has made changes to the regime to prevent the risk of spreading the virus. We all need to keep doing all of these. This includes wearing face coverings, testing staff and testing anyone arriving into prison. We will also continue to keep new arrivals in isolation until we know they do not have coronavirus, either through testing or 14 days of isolation. All these measures will help us keep the infection out of the prison or prevent it spread in the event of an outbreak.

As well as reducing the amount of contact you have with other people, you can help to protect yourself and others by sneezing or coughing into a tissue and throwing it away, wear a face covering when you are advised and regularly washing your hands.

We are also regularly testing staff and provide face masks for them to wear, to help prevent the spread. Staff will be vaccinated the same way as you so based on their age and clinically vulnerability. There may be an opportunity later to vaccinate based on occupation or jobs but the government’s priority in this current phase is to vaccinate people based on their risk of serious illness if they caught coronavirus.

Like the flu vaccine, this vaccine is designed to protect you from the virus and prevent you from getting seriously ill if you do catch it. You may still be able to spread the vaccination so we need to make sure that you continue to follow all the guidelines in place in your prison, even if you have had the vaccine.

We know that regimes are restricted and social visits have had to be suspended again due to the rise in the number of people with coronavirus both in the community and in our prisons. This is understandably frustrating and upsetting for you and your loved ones. Vaccination is a big part of being able to reduce restrictions in prison and in the community but it will take time to get everyone vaccinated.

In the meantime, you should follow the guidelines to protect yourself even if you have had the vaccination because you may still be able to spread it to other people.

This has been such a difficult time. Everyone living and working in prisons has done an amazing job coping with this, and pulling together to keep each other safe. Thank you, and please keep going. We all want to be given this vaccine as soon as possible so that we can go back to normal and we completely understand how frustrating it is to wait your turn and we appreciate your patience.