LETTER TO BRANCHES

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To: All Branches

Dear Colleagues,

Coronavirus Covid-19 Vaccines Update:

The Health, Safety & Environment Department has received a number of enquiries regarding Coronavirus/Covid-19 Vaccine inoculations and this is a summary update to assist members following announcements and stories published through the media.

The Coronavirus/Covid-19 Vaccine is not yet available despite the news coverage and is completely separate from the Flu Vaccine which is currently available and which people are being inoculated with via the 'Free Flu Jab' schemes the Union has agreed with RMG and POL plus the NHS Scheme for those now eligible.

The situation in respect of the various Coronavirus/Covid-19 Vaccines is in summary as follows:

Efforts are being made by a number of pharmaceutical companies in a number of countries to find and produce an effective, safe to administer, vaccine, to protect the world against Coronavirus but experts say more than one will be needed to combat the pandemic, and researchers across the world are working to develop several Covid-19 vaccine/inoculation jabs.

The UK government in recent statements have said that they are committed to rolling out a Coronavirus vaccine as soon as one has been approved in the UK.

There are more than 200 vaccines being developed and tested around the world. Around 12 of these are in the final stages of testing but the joint **'Pfizer/BioNTech'** partnership and **'Moderna'** are the first two to report positive results in announcements made earlier this week.

Pfizer, the US multi-national pharmaceutical giant, who are working with German partner **BioNTech**, announced that their Covid-19 vaccine is 95% effective, according to final results from final trials. **Pfizer** said it had the required two-months of safety data and would now be making an application for emergency US authorisation within a matter of days. The **Pfizer/BioNTech** vaccine has been tested on volunteers in six countries. The findings are interim and studies are continuing but it has been reportedly tested on 43,500 people in six countries and no safety concerns have been raised so far. The jab is known as a messenger RNA (mRNA) vaccine, which uses the virus's genetic code rather than any part of the virus itself, is injected into the body where it enters cells and tells them to create antigens.

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Moderna, the US biotechnology company, released preliminary data for its vaccine, showing their product had 90% effectiveness.

The better-than-expected data from the two vaccines, both developed with new technology known as messenger RNA (mRNA), have raised hopes for an end to a resurgent pandemic that has killed more than 1.3 million people globally and wreaked havoc across many countries, hitting economies and daily life.

AstraZeneca, the British multinational pharmaceutical and biopharmaceutical company, who are working with the **University of Oxford** and are the third participant in the race to develop a vaccine, is also in phase three of clinical trials presently. The results of the **Oxford University/AstraZeneca** vaccine trials will be published before Christmas. More than 20,000 volunteers are participating in trials for the **Oxford University/AstraZeneca** vaccine, in countries including the UK, South Africa, Brazil and Kenya. The vaccine trial team are optimistic that data on its safety and efficacy of the vaccine will be available by the end of the year. The **Oxford University/AstraZeneca** vaccine, called ChAdOx1 nCoV-19, uses a weakened version of a common cold virus (adenovirus) which causes infections in chimpanzees.

Other potential vaccines in phase three trials have been developed by biotech company **Novavax** and **Russia** announced this week that early data for its **Sputnik V vaccine** shows 92% effectiveness.

Another vaccine is being developed by **Imperial College London**. It is in phase one of clinical testing, where doses are given to a small group of people to determine whether it is safe and to learn more about the immune response. Data on its efficacy will be available in the middle of next year.

Pharmaceutical companies **Sanofi** and **GlaxoSmithKline** have also teamed up with the hope of making a vaccine available by the middle of next year. Their vaccine is in the phase two stage, where the vaccine is given to hundreds of people so scientists can learn more about its safety and correct dosage, and phase three is planned by the end of the year.

The UK Government has secured 40 million doses of the **Pfizer/BioNTech** vaccine, the first agreement the firms have signed with any government. The Health Secretary Matt Hancock said that the UK will have procured 10 million doses to be distributed by the end of this year. An 'initial agreement' had also been reached for 5 million doses of the **Moderna vaccine.** Further data is awaited on this vaccine and the company is currently increasing its production operation in order to meet demand. It's thought each person needs two doses of this particular vaccine, so the 5 million doses would be enough to vaccinate 2.5 million people.

In August, the UK government announced it had secured access to six of the producers of Covid-19 vaccines in development, representing 340 million doses.

A vaccine usually takes years, often decades, to develop, but scientists working on potential Coronavirus jabs are hoping to achieve the same huge amount of work in a few months. Neither the **Moderna** nor the **Pfizer/BioNTech** vaccines have passed final regulatory approval as yet - but they have different timetables. The **Pfizer/BioNTech** vaccine, if approved by regulators, will be rolled out sooner but the government still hasn't promised a launch date. The Prime Minister said he "hoped" the NHS will be able to start distributing the vaccines to those who need it, perhaps even before Christmas. However, Health Secretary Matt Hancock warned that the "vast bulk" of any rollout of the **Pfizer/BioNTech** jab would be in the new year.

The UK's medicines regulator could approve the **Pfizer/BioNTech** or **Oxford University/AstraZeneca** jabs within days of a licence application being submitted, according to Health Secretary Matt Hancock who said this week that the Medicines and Healthcare

products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has been carrying out a rolling review of data from both **Pfizer/BioNTech** and **Oxford University/AstraZeneca** and that means that the regulator will be able to make a judgment on whether this is clinically safe, and not just take the company's word for it, but do that within a matter of days from a formal licence application.

It is hoped by the government that the first phase of the vaccination programme in the UK will protect 99% of those at risk of death from Covid-19, before moving on to younger age groups.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said the military and NHS staff were on standby to roll out a vaccine across the UK from the start of December, and will work "seven days a week" to do so. He added that it will be delivered through care homes, GPs and pharmacists, as well as 'go-to' vaccination centres set up in venues such as sports halls and concluded that the UK will be among the first countries in the world able to do this. He said that the **Oxford University/AstraZeneca** vaccine was easier to deploy than the **Pfizer/BioNTech** vaccine, which needs to be kept at a temperature of minus 70°C and is being manufactured in Belgium. He said that from the moment the **Pfizer/BioNTech** vaccine leaves the factory in Belgium it can only be taken out of minus 70°C four times before it is injected into a patient's arm. While it will be a "mammoth logistical operation", Matt Hancock said he had "confidence" it can be delivered.

Yours sincerely

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