

## **STATEMENT BY THE GSLP/LIBERAL OPPOSITION**

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In a statement last week the EU Health Security Committee and the Early Warning and Response authorities issued a policy statement proposed by the European Commission, which outlined target and priority groups for vaccination against swine flu. There has been no such official list of priority groups issued in Gibraltar in relation to vaccination and attempted prevention of swine flu as opposed to its treatment.

The Opposition understands that the reason why these target groups have to be identified is because there will be short supply of the vaccine in its early stages and Governments have to prioritise which groups are most at risk and should get it first.

The EU document has identified three groups. These are:

- (a) all persons from 6 months old with underlying chronic conditions starting with those with the most severe symptoms;
- (b) pregnant women;
- (c) health care workers.

The EU statement adds that it is the responsibility and mandate of each Member State to develop a vaccination strategy for influenza A H1N1. Given this situation, it is clear that Gibraltar is regarded as a separate Member State for this purpose as the strategy we have been adopting in relation to swine flu to date has been different to that adopted by the United Kingdom and therefore our priority groups might be different as well.

In the UK, for example, Northern Ireland has already made public the priority groups who will be the first to receive the vaccination. These are people aged between six months and 65 years in the current seasonal flu vaccine clinical and risk groups. All pregnant women will also be receiving it subject to licensing conditions, the household contacts of immunocompromised individuals and people aged 65 and over in the current seasonal flu vaccine clinical at risk group. Frontline health and social care workers will also be among the first to be vaccinated in Northern Ireland for obvious reasons.

There is scope for differences between countries as to both who will be prioritised and the proportion of the population who will be vaccinated. Some countries, for example Greece, the Netherlands, Israel and Canada have ordered enough doses of the vaccine for their whole populations. In other cases countries like Germany, the United States, France and the United Kingdom have ordered for between 30 – 78% of their populations. In Northern Ireland, it is anticipated that vaccines could be administered from mid-October on a phased basis as

delivery comes in, and sufficient quantities have been ordered to ensure that that the entire population is vaccinated, if needed.

Commenting on the matter, Shadow Minister for Health Neil Costa said:

“However, contrary to what has been happening elsewhere, there has been no news from the Gibraltar Government on the specific issue of priorities. While it is true that there has been some debate among experts as to who should receive priority treatment, some, for example, are recommending that all schoolchildren should be vaccinated. There can no longer be any excuse for the absence of information as to what the priorities will be in Gibraltar following the EU statement.”

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