

To:  
Paul Hawkins, Director for Covid-19 Vaccination Delivery  
Gregor Smith, Chief Medical Officer

The Fostering Network  
Ingram House, 2nd floor  
227 Ingram Street  
Glasgow  
G1 1DA

10 February 2021

Dear Mr Hawkins and Dr Smith,

**Vaccination prioritisation for foster carers**

We are writing in relation to Mr Hawkins' correspondence on 28 January to all third and independent health and social care providers and representatives detailing plans for the prioritisation of the vaccine for health and social care workers.

Whilst we completely support the prioritisation of the vaccine for those front line social care workers who provide direct care to those most at risk of Covid-19, we were extremely disappointed to read that foster carers have not been included within Scotland's Phase 1/JCVI priority Group 2. In fact, Appendix B of Mr Hawkins' correspondence clearly states foster carers are not eligible for the vaccine in priority Group 2.

Unlike the other groups highlighted in Appendix B, who can maintain social distancing and continue to do their roles with minimal face-to-face meetings required, foster carers work with children who cannot always maintain social distancing and, due to their unique caring role, have to mix with multiple households and professionals.

The Fostering Network would like to take this opportunity to highlight the tasks undertaken by foster carers and explain why we are urging for a reconsideration of the current position and for foster carers to be viewed alongside other social care workers in the eligible group for priority Group 2. As a membership organisation, representing 100 per cent of fostering providers in Scotland, we also feel the need to highlight both foster carers and fostering service's concerns around current practice increasing foster carers' personal risk to exposure.

Foster carers are trained and approved children's social care workers who provide care, stability and consistency for nearly three-quarters of children looked after away from home and family across Scotland. In performing this vital social care role, foster carers are being exposed to multiple households. Many children are being supported by their foster carers to maintain face-to-face court ordered contact with their birth families. We are hearing from our members of their concerns around



the failure or refusal of those they, and the children they care for, directly interact with to follow infection prevention and control guidance and practices. In addition, social workers continue to make statutory visits to fostering households as do other professionals such as the police and mental health practitioners. Many foster carers are also facilitating children moving on from foster care to alternative placements, including adoptive placements. As a result, foster carers and their families are at increased personal risk of exposure as well as being at risk of transmitting the virus to other staff, birth family members and other carers.

Through our Fosterline Scotland helpline we are hearing of many cases where the impact of these decisions around face-to-face meetings is resulting in placement instability for children and a reduction of capacity within the children's social care system as some carers are feeling like they cannot continue to foster, becoming too ill to foster, or being threatened by the service that the child will be moved if they do not comply. Staffing levels in the children's social care system and maintaining stability for some of society's most vulnerable children should be of paramount concern to the Scottish Government.

We believe including foster carers in priority Group 2 of the vaccine programme would:

- Provide foster carers with protection such that they would feel able to manage a higher level of risk in relation to exposure to and transmission of coronavirus through their work with the children in their care, the children's families, social workers and other professionals. This would maintain staffing levels and capacity in the children's social care sector as well as ensure placement stability and continuity for children.
- Enable foster carers who are currently not offering placements because they are concerned about the risks involved due to coronavirus to return to fostering, opening up additional foster placements to children needing them.

The Fostering Network remain committed as an organisation to support all efforts to address the aforementioned concerns and continue to work closely with foster carers and fostering service staff. We urge the Scottish Government to include foster carers in priority group two for the vaccine as part of the social care workforce.

Yours sincerely,

*Sara Lurie*

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