Department of Health & Social Care

Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

22 December 2020

Dear Dr Raine

**BNT162b2**

As you will be aware, the COVID-19 Pfizer and BioNTech vaccine (BNT162b) is being actively deployed in the UK under Regulation 174 of The Human Medicines Regulations 2012. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those at the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) for their tireless work to ensure that the highest standards of quality and safety inform the vaccine deployment programme. This has been, and will continue to be, critical to ensuring public confidence in this vital part of our response to the pandemic.

You will be aware that a new SARS-CoV-2 strain has arisen and is now becoming dominant in London and wider South-East England. Initial scientific analysis suggests this new variant appears to be more transmissible than the predecessor strain. Laboratory analysis is under way to confirm whether this new strain is neutralised by sera raised against BNT162b. These experiments will not be fully completed for another two to three weeks. However, given that COVID-19 vaccines elicit a polyclonal antibody response, the majority scientific opinion is that there is a low probability that the vaccine will have substantially less protective efficacy against the new strain.

As we currently find ourselves in a period of increased COVID-19 incidence in the United Kingdom population, there is a strong argument for aiming to immunise as large a proportion of the population as possible with one dose of an authorised vaccine in the first instance, to give wide protection, and then offering the booster dose after an extended interval, potentially 3-4 months.

We therefore ask that the MHRA expert working group and Committee for Human Medicines urgently provide a specific steer on whether second dosing of BNT162b2 could be moved to a more extended interval, thereby giving operational flexibility to enable a larger proportion of the population to receive a first dose (and some important initial protection) in a shorter timeframe should that be required.

Yours sincerely,

Personal Data

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