

Dr Neil O'Brien, a GP in Chester-le-Street and accountable officer for NHS County Durham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), NHS Sunderland CCG and NHS South Tyneside CCG said: "We have had to make some changes to the rollout of the COVID vaccination programme in the North East.

"I appreciate that this might cause concern to people given the huge amount of positivity surrounding the news that a vaccine was available but I would like to reassure people that those identified priority groups will still be invited to receive the vaccine. This programme will continue into January as it is so extensive so we ask that everyone is patient.

"We are operating in unprecedented times and already our local doctors and nurses have vaccinated hundreds of people with the COVID vaccine. That is fantastic news and I am very grateful for the efforts of our local GP practices in pulling out all the stops to get this done in challenging circumstances.

"With the limited supplies we have available, we need to make sure that the entire region receives a good spread of supply to offer to our priority groups.

"This wasn't a decision we took lightly and is not something that our local GP practices decided. The decision was made along with partners in NHS England, to ensure that our approach to vaccinating people in the North East was fair and equitable.

The patients who may have been earmarked to receive a vaccine next week will now be vaccinated when the programme re-commences week commencing 4th January. This also avoided the potential of having to vaccinate patients on Christmas Day when the uptake of the vaccine may not have been as high for understandable reasons.

"Finally, I would like to reinforce my point that everyone in the priority groups that needs a vaccine will be offered one and this is a temporary measure to ensure that the limited stock we have is used in a fair way for everyone across the North East."

ENDS