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8th December 2020

Open Letter to Glasgow South constituents: COVID19 vaccine

2020 has been a year like no other. The pandemic has meant that we've all had to make sacrifices and pitch in more than ever before to look out for one another. As expected, Southsiders right across my constituency rose to that challenge.

Whether you're a nurse, doctor or carer who has helped look after some of the most vulnerable people in the month's past, a supermarket worker or delivery driver who has helped keep the country going, or even just followed the rules and stayed at home when asked – thank you.

I know this year has not been easy, and it will continue to be difficult in the next few weeks and months to come. Now, though, we can now see there is light at the end of the tunnel.

As the first vaccines start to be rolled out across Scotland, this is a monumental week for science and solidarity.

It will take time to administer these vaccines – starting with those that need it most, and then onto the rest of the population in stages.

I want to urge you, when the time comes, to ensure you take the vaccine. Follow in the footsteps of 90-year-old Margaret Keenan – the first person in the world to receive the vaccine – who said, “if I can do it, so can you”.

The vaccine will be administered in stages, starting with the most vulnerable groups first - as studied by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) - and then working down through the population. A full list of priorities is available on Gov.uk.

The first phase of distribution will take place from December to February.

Those who meet the criteria will be contacted by post or, if they work in health and social care, by their employer. Eventually, everyone over the age of 18 will be offered the vaccine.

I want to assure Southsiders that the vaccine is safe. All vaccines go through rigorous and proper testing and safety procedures, as well as advice from the independent JCVI and the UK's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) before being approved. It is clear the scientific experts have concluded that the vaccine is safe.

So, this is my final plea – **if you are offered the vaccine, get it.**

However, there is another virus out there that we must protect ourselves against if we are all to emerge safely from this nightmare and that is disinformation – vaccine and COVID19 related.



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Though in the minority, antivax and anti-lockdown disinformation can spread to masses amount of people on social media, which is a risk to our public health collectively.

Fake news is bad for our health.

I am asking fellow Southsiders to exercise caution when reading and sharing news about the vaccine so not to fan the flames of disinformation, particularly on social media.

To guard against fake news, please always consider the source of news, check the date, read the article and look for back up sources – these easy steps can help you protect everyone else. The best information will always come from public health authorities, such as the NHS.

As I said, I know this has been a tough year, but if we continue to follow the advice and steps outlined here, we can guard ourselves against the virus and fake news, and ensure we come out of this together both safely and as fast as is possible with a return to normality – something we can all look forward to with friends, family and loved ones.

With best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Stewart McDonald".

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