
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

To: Producers of health-related statistics in England

26 May 2021

Dear Colleagues

Statistics on COVID-19 vaccinations

Transparent statistics about COVID-19 vaccinations are important to support delivery of the vaccination programme and understanding of the pandemic. These statistics are also subject to high levels of public interest. It is testament to the hard work of you and your colleagues that such detailed and timely statistics are available to support the vaccination programme and inform the public.

Since our rapid review¹ of NHS England and Improvement (NHSEI) statistics on COVID-19 vaccinations², we have seen continued improvements in the data published by NHSEI, including more granular data in both the monthly and weekly vaccination statistics. For example, the weekly publication now includes breakdowns of vaccinations by all the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) cohorts (with the exception of under 40s which are grouped), and the monthly publication includes vaccinations by index of deprivation and ethnic group, including uptake percentages for these groups. The level of detail provided through the geographic breakdowns is very impressive. NHSEI has also included better information on the data sources and indications of the timeliness and coverage.

Our review of NHSEI statistics also highlighted the need for improvements to the accessibility and coherence of data on vaccinations. It can be hard for users to be aware of what data exists, and then to navigate through the information and understand what it means. Users should be supported to gain insight from the published data, such as the improvements to uptake over time, by appropriate commentary. We have seen some improvements to the information included in the NHSEI publication since our review, such as clearer explanation of what the publication covers and more on the key messages, but there is more insight which could be extracted from the wealth of data through better presentation.

The recent addition of Local Authority level vaccination data in the coronavirus dashboard³ is a very positive step towards making sure data on vaccinations reaches a wider audience in an accessible way. It has been helpful having daily data in the dashboard, and we

¹ [Letter from Ed Humpherson to Mark Svenson, 1 April 2021](#)

² [NHS E&I COVID-19 vaccinations statistics](#)

³ [Gov.uk Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in the UK dashboard](#)

welcome the consistency between the daily data for England in the coronavirus dashboard and the daily data published by NHSEI. To further improve the accessibility and presentation of the data, I support the inclusion of further vaccination data in the dashboard, such as vaccinations by age and by middle layer super output area (MSOA).

To fully understand the vaccination programme and its impacts, data published by NHSEI alone are not sufficient. Producers need to collaborate and contribute their expertise to best effect. We have seen the Department for Health and Social Care play an important role in supporting collaboration within England and across the devolved administrations and it is positive to see information published by other bodies to support understanding. For example, Public Health England (PHE) publishes vaccine surveillance reports⁴, which analyse the impact on disease, hospitalisation and mortality as a result of the vaccination programme, and also provides information about the effectiveness of COVID-19 vaccinations⁵. We have also seen the Office for National Statistics (ONS) contributing to the evidence base with publications such as the Coronavirus Latest Insights⁶ dashboard and the Coronavirus and vaccine attitudes release⁷. To maximise value and minimise confusion, more should be done to ensure all publications are clear on their purpose and include signposting to other relevant publications. For example, the inclusion of a related data section in the NHSEI publication is a helpful addition.

Producers also need to work together to ensure gaps in the existing data are filled. It is important that the data exist to answer key question such as the number of vaccinations delivered by age band below 40, the number of vaccinations declined, and appointments not attended.

Finally, there should be greater clarity on the denominators. The weekly NHSEI statistics include two population estimates from different sources (ONS mid-year population estimates⁸ and the National Immunisation Management Service (NIMS)⁹). The choice on which of these to use can impact on the uptake percentages. For example, when the two different sources of population estimates are applied to calculate the percentage of vaccine uptake by region and age group, the figures differ, sometimes by over 10 percentage points. The NHSEI publication is clear about the circumstances in which each denominator should be used and provides some information on the implications. For example, in relation to ONS mid-year population estimates it states: "Vaccine uptake percentages calculated using the ONS 2019 mid-year population estimates are likely to be overestimates." However, it should be clearer which groups are most impacted and the resulting implications for the quality of the percentage uptake figures for different demographic groupings. It is important that more granular data on the roll out are made available, this will need administrative data from NIMS.

I am grateful for the work you are doing to provide these important statistics and your consideration of the areas highlighted in this letter. My Health and Social Care team will continue to liaise with you and please do not hesitate to get in touch with me if you would like to discuss any aspects of this letter further.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccine-surveillance-report>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/phe-monitoring-of-the-effectiveness-of-covid-19-vaccination>

⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19/latestinsights>

⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/releases/coronavirusandvaccineattitudesandbehavioursinenglandover80spopulation15februaryto20february2021>

⁸ [Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19/latestinsights)

⁹ [National Immunisation Management Service population estimates](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/articles/coronaviruscovid19/latestinsights)

I have copied this letter to Simon Stevens, Chief Executive, NHS England and Improvement.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation

Full list of recipients:

Lucy Vickers, Head of Profession for Statistics, Department of Health and Social Care

Mark Svenson, Head of Operational Information, NHS England and Improvement

Clare Griffiths, Head of Profession for Statistics, Public Health England

Iain Bell, Director General for Population and Public Policy, Office for National Statistics