



Micheál Martin TD
Taoiseach
Government Buildings
Merrion Street Upper
Dublin D02 R583

1st April 2021

Dear Taoiseach,

Request to Government to reinstate priority vaccination status to Special Needs Assistants

The changes to the Covid-19 vaccination schedule announced in the 30th March 2021 will further delay vaccinations for special needs assistants working in our schools who are exposed on a daily basis to the risk of contracting and transmitting the virus.

There are few other groups outside of health and social care who work on a consistent basis providing intimate care without the ability to maintain social distancing.

The role of the SNA is directly comparable to many staff working in health and social care. They provide the same care to students with additional needs as do staff in HSE disability services. In our special schools, healthcare staff such as nurses, occupational therapists and physiotherapists have all been vaccinated through the HSE roll-out, whilst the SNAs who work alongside them with the same students have not been vaccinated. That is not a fair or sustainable situation.

When the Government sought to re-open our schools in January last, a range of mitigation measures were agreed and implemented. A key component of this approach was the scheduling of vaccinations for SNAs as a priority. This clear and definitive policy commitment was given to SNAs, it was a key factor in building confidence in reopening schools and remains an essential measure in keeping schools open for in-person learning.

The effect of the decision to remove priority status for SNAs will be felt most acutely in special education settings, where staff and parents are doing their utmost to ensure that students with additional needs are able to attend their school. The vaccination of our SNAs is the single most effective measure that will ensure these vital services remain open should public health conditions deteriorate once more.

Many countries have implemented an age based vaccination schedule whilst also maintaining priority status for essential staff including SNAs. There are 17,000 SNA posts allocated to our schools. Including them in the new vaccine schedule within the revised Category 9 would not cause significant delays to the vaccination of other groups, indeed the vaccination of those with severe underlying health conditions would be completed before SNAs would receive the vaccine.

Taoiseach, our SNAs were promised by your Government that they would be prioritised for receipt of the vaccine as part of the first 30% of the population, their counterparts and colleagues in health and social care have received the vaccine, SNAs have fulfilled their role in reopening schools they now feel that they were misled and have been badly let down by the Government decision to exclude them from priority status.

Fórsa therefore asks that the Government reviews the decision to remove SNAs from the vaccine priority list. SNAs work in crowded settings, with no social distancing should be included as one of the groups due to be vaccinated under Category 9 within the new vaccination schedule.

Yours Sincerely,

Andy Pike

Head of Education

Fórsa Trade Union

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