

11<sup>th</sup> June 2021

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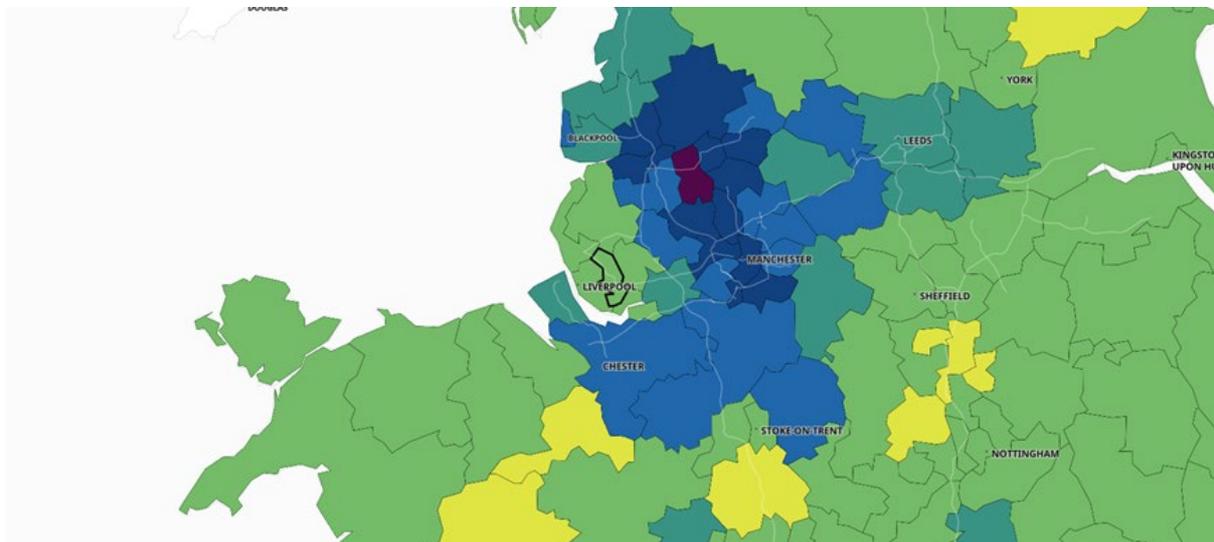
The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Nadhim Zahawi MP  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment

Dear Matt, Nadhim

The North West is now currently at the epicentre of rising case rates of COVID-19. It is inevitable that we will enter what for us will be a **fourth** wave of the virus. The advent of the Delta variant means that we currently face a more transmissible virus and, critically, that a single dose of the vaccine is less effective – maximum protection comes from having both doses.

The map below shows how the wave of infection in the North West is spreading - the Liverpool City Region is increasingly “surrounded” by areas with higher infection levels, and local authority boundaries have no impact in terms of preventing the virus from spreading. It certainly looks like the Liverpool City Region might be “next”.



(Source: Seven-day rolling rate of new cases by specimen date ending on 5 June 2021 - accessed via Gov.uk “Coronavirus in the UK”)

Again, this will be the fourth wave to impact on our City Region. Our learning from the three previous waves tells us that we are probably a few weeks at most behind the picture we are seeing across Greater Manchester, Lancashire, and Cheshire.

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This means that there is an urgent need NOW to achieve **maximum** vaccine coverage across our vulnerable cohorts and also to accelerate the vaccination to provide wider population coverage. It is all the more important to minimise the current wave before we move towards the autumn.

We wrote to Minister Zahawi on 21<sup>st</sup> May with our initial ask for accelerated vaccination and greater local control and to date we have not yet received a response. We need to take this action now to mitigate the growth in infection in line with the approach being taken in the other parts of the North West where the infection growth is already proving problematic. Waiting until the wave inevitably reaches us in the next couple of weeks – at the same time as the relaxation of lockdown and increased social mobility – is going to create a larger wave with deeper impacts, exactly as we have seen in previous waves across the North West. We need to heed the lessons from previous waves and not simply repeat the approaches taken previously.

The Liverpool City Region is already challenged by deep-rooted health inequalities, and these have been made worse by the impact of COVID-19 on our local population and economy. In terms of cases and sadly in terms of mortality, we know that the pandemic has hit our City Region harder than many other areas of the country - parts of our City Region have faced the highest case levels in the country at numerous points over the course of the pandemic. A “one size fits all” approach to the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination programme fails to recognise that the virus doesn’t impact on every area of the country equally, and will further exacerbate these inequalities. The vaccination programme clearly needs to be accelerated in these areas where the spread of the virus accelerates.

The Liverpool City Region is again, therefore, asking the Government to support us by giving us the flexibility to drive vaccination uptake.

We are asking for the age group eligibility to be accelerated locally so that we can get above the national curve in terms of protecting our population and reducing the future impact of COVID-19 across our entire population. The wider we can vaccinate people, the more we can protect our vulnerable people and maintain our public services.

The current NHS “command and control” delivery of the vaccination programme on a national footprint has been effective in driving delivery in the initial vulnerable cohorts, and we are grateful for the progress made to date. But it is not addressing the needs of the population in the Liverpool City Region and across the North West in the face of the disproportionate impact which we are facing now. We need more flexibility in how we deliver the programme locally to meet need and to be able to benefit from our in-depth understanding of our communities. This may mean opening the programme up for all eligible adults. It may involve more targeted and intensive support such as mobile delivery. We need permission and support to shape delivery locally. The “one size fits all” approach simply does not recognise the



learning of the last year – which is that the virus spreads more quickly in some parts of the country than it does in others.

We also request additional resources to enable us to meet this challenge, for example the provision of a more mobile vaccination offer in our communities. We need to do more to bring the vaccine to the people.

In view of the regional position, we also ask for the prioritisation of our City Region and indeed the rest of the North West in respect of the allocation and use of the single-dose Johnson and Johnson vaccine which can deliver a more rapid higher level of protection within our younger population.

Yours sincerely

**Steve Rotheram**  
Metro Mayor, Liverpool City Region

**Cllr Mike Wharton**  
Leader of Halton Council

**Cllr Joanne Anderson**  
Mayor of Liverpool

**Cllr David Baines**  
Leader of St Helens Council

**Cllr Graham Morgan**  
Leader of Knowsley Council

**Cllr Ian Maher**  
Leader of Sefton Council

**Cllr Janette Williamson**  
Leader of Wirral Council