

Extract from BBC Wales Website 5th January 2021

Police officers must be prioritised for the coronavirus vaccine as they "risk their safety" to enforce lockdown rules, a police federation has warned.

Hundreds have been off work with Covid-19, including one whose heavily pregnant wife then became infected.

NHS and careworkers are among those first in line for the vaccines, but police are not on the priority list.

The Welsh Government said it was following guidance to determine priority groups.

Other key workers, including teachers and police officers, are not under the priority category and have to wait to be immunised depending on the age group and risk category they fall into.

Those representing officers in Wales' four police forces said they were repeatedly putting their own safety and that of their loved ones at risk in order to protect the public.

Scores of officers have been spat at and coughed on while on duty, federation officials said.

In North Wales officers were called to break up an incident involving two women who were self isolating on Christmas Day, having to arrest one of them who was waiting for a test result.

Officers 'seriously ill' Mark Jones, of the North Wales Police Federation, said the officers had to decontaminate their uniforms afterwards.

"These officers finish their shifts and have to go home to their loved ones and families, having come into high risk of contracting Covid," he said.

He stressed that a number of officers had also ended up seriously ill in hospital after contracting the virus.

A petition, launched by the father of a South Wales Police officer who contracted Covid-19 while on duty, calls for the Welsh Government to immunise frontline officers.

Graham Bishop said his son passed on the virus to his heavily pregnant wife, who ended up on a Covid ward. He said: "She had to have an emergency caesarean section with the twins born a month early.

"Not only are police at high risk to themselves every day, they also risk their families. Additionally, the loss of policing time is a great strain on the force when officers are off sick with Covid."

Wales has been under the highest level of lockdown - level four - since before Christmas, with people being told to stay home and only go out for essential reasons.

But officers have been breaking up house parties, illegal gatherings and barring visitors trying to visit beauty spots across Wales.

Chief Constable of South Wales Police Jeremy Vaughan said the force was handing out a lot of fines for people blatantly breaching lockdown laws.

In December alone the force issued 500 fixed penalty notices, Mr Vaughan said.

"Every week I'm sending cards and letters to police officers who are getting spat at in the face by people who say that they've got Covid," he told BBC Radio Wales.

"Police officers are putting themselves in harms way."

'Not unfair prioritising'

Roger Webb, secretary of Dyfed Powys Police Federation, said even trying to stop people visiting beauty spots was a risk to officers' safety, let alone dealing with emergencies and volatile situations.

"It is not about unfairly prioritising police officers over everyone else, we understand the need for the most vulnerable and frontline health service staff to be right at the top of the list for the new vaccines," Mr Webb said.

"But the reality is that the police come into contact with every part of society, the good and the bad. "To not prioritise police officers is a mistake made in vain of protecting the public."

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-55546072>