

Merck Sharp & Dohme Limited

Albert D Angel
Managing Director

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K. Clarke, Esq., M.P.,
Minister of State for Health,
Department of Health & Social Security,
Alexander Fleming House,
Elephant & Castle,
London SE1 6BY

Dear Minister,

I very much regret that circumstances have prevented the planned visit of the Secretary of State to the United States, especially as a part of his schedule included a visit to our Hepatitis B manufacturing plant.

As you may know, this new vaccine requires a most complicated (and expensive) production cycle involving in excess of twelve months to completion. Given the limited supplies that will be available this year and next, and the worldwide demand which far exceeds current and near-term availability, our Company has taken steps seeking to assure quantities for the U.K.

In our briefing for Mr. Fowler, we indicated that we had been able to reserve up to 100,000 courses (300,000 doses) for this country for delivery this year. Furthermore, we have obtained initial commitment that the U.K. be treated as a priority country since limited availability requires limitation of the number of countries in which the vaccine can be supplied. I am sure you will agree that it would be embarrassing for us both to find that inaction on our part precluded the U.K. from benefits available in other countries.

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K. Clarke, Esq., M.P.,
Minister of State for Health.

At the time of the briefing, we were aware that the vaccine was in the final stages of the registration approval process. We were also aware that your Department was to receive expert advice as to vaccination policy which would presumably include indications as to which groups of people at risk should benefit initially.

We have now been informed that the vaccine has passed all approval stages and expect to receive the Product Licence shortly. Accordingly, we would like to confirm our offer to supply, commencing in the autumn, whatever quantity up to 300,000 doses you may require this year. We obviously wish to avoid embarrassment both to your Department and to ourselves by not offering more than we feel we may be in a position to supply and would not consider the possibility of making it more widely available without satisfying your requirements first.

If there is any further information you require we shall be pleased to meet at your convenience, but in order to safeguard this initial priority supply for a U.K. governmental programme, we should appreciate your early consideration.

Yours sincerely,