**Briefing for NHS organisation and Local Authorities plus FAQs**

**COVID-19 Vaccination for healthy 12-15 year olds**

Healthy children aged 12-15 are being offered the opportunity to have a first dose of the COVID-19 vaccination before the October half-term break following announcements from Government.

This follows advice from the UK nation’s four chief medical officers who said that there was a benefit to children in relation to maintaining their education with concerns that missing face-to-face school had a "massive impact" on children, both physically, emotional and in terms of their life chances.

While school closures are unlikely, disruption to face-to-face education will continue because pupils and teachers who test positive have to isolate for 10 days.

The recommendation is that 12-15 year olds will be offered a first dose only, which will be of the Pfizer-BioNTech (Comirnaty) vaccine, which is the only vaccine currently authorised for those aged 12-15.

This follows the recommendation that those aged 12-15 at greater risk of serious COVID-19, or who are household contacts of severely immunosuppressed individuals, are offered two doses. Those that have specific immunosuppressive condition as set out in JCVI guidance should have three doses in their primary schedule.

School vaccination services will have processes to exclude children that have already received a first dose under previous JCVI advice.

Parents or guardians do not need to contact their local GP or other NHS services, nor make an appointment through the National Booking Service.

Parents or guardians of children aged 12-15 will begin to receive letters with details of when the vaccination will be offered and will be asked to provide their consent for their child to receive the vaccination, either through an online or a paper form

The vaccine is safe, quick and effective. It does not give people the COVID-19 virus and does not contain any animal products.

Children do not need to be registered with a GP or have an NHS number to be vaccinated.

This year, the school aged flu vaccine has also been extended so that as well as children in primary school and year 7, it will now be offered to those in years 8 to 11.

Most secondary school aged children will be eligible for both flu and COVID-19 vaccinations this winter, to protect themselves and those around them. We hope that as many as possible will come forward to get both vaccinations when they are invited.

Key element is that written parental consent is required in advance of the vaccinations being offered in school.

In the North East and North Cumbria school vaccination services will only vaccinate children in school when parent or guardian **has provided prior written consent.**

Because the school services need to operate quickly, there will not be time to discuss issues around consent.

School vaccination services will NOT vaccinate a child in the following circumstances:

* When parent/guardian has not provided advance written consent
* If the school vaccination service does not have a record of parental consent (eg if the form has gone missing)
* When children express a desire to be vaccinated but parent/guardian have not provided advance written consent
* When parents have provided advance written consent and the child has said they do not want to be vaccinated.

In all these circumstances the school vaccination service will follow up with parents and/or child in order to offer further support and provide sign posting, in particular if a further discussion about consent is required.

There will be other opportunities for children to be vaccinated should consent be gained in future as well as for people who initially decide not to take up the offer to be vaccinated and change their mind later.

**Frequently asked questions and answers**

**Why you should have your child vaccinated?**

The UK’s Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) all agree that while COVID-19 is typically mild or asymptomatic in most young people, it can be very unpleasant for some and 1 dose of the vaccine will provide good protection against severe illness and hospitalisation.

Vaccinating 12 to 15 year olds should also help to reduce the need for young people to have time-off school and reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 within schools.

The COVID-19 secondary schools vaccine programme should therefore provide protection to young people and reduce the disruption to face to face education. This will help to keep young people emotionally well and happier and this was an important consideration for the CMOs.

**The COVID-19 vaccine**

The COVID-19 vaccine helps to reduce the chance of COVID-19 infection and provides good protection against serious disease. It may take a few weeks to build up some protection from the first dose of vaccine.

**Is it safe for young people?**

The medicines regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), has confirmed the Pfizer vaccine is safe and effective for 12 to 17 year olds. This followed a rigorous review of the safety, quality and effectiveness of the vaccines in this age group.

The UK has also benefited from having data from the US, Canada and Israel, which have already offered vaccines universally to young people aged 12 to 15 years.

These 2 videos from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) explain this in more detail: [video 1](https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1434441175281274890) and [video 2](https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1405246298320637960).

**How were the vaccines developed so quickly?**

All vaccines have had 3 stages of clinical trials and were tested on tens of thousands of people around the world. The trial phases were run in parallel, speeding up the overall time of vaccine production, but not the critical research time.

Since December 2020 the Pfizer vaccine has been given to millions of people in the UK and has an excellent safety record.

These 2 videos from DHSC explain this in more detail: [video 3](https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1375364398601039872) and [video 4](https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1421206463297441793).

**How the consent process works**

All parents, or those with parental responsibility, are asked for consent and will usually make this decision jointly with their children. [The information leaflet](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1017171/PHE_12073_COVID-19_guide_for_all_CYP.pdf) is addressed to the child (as the recipient of the vaccine) and encourages them to discuss the decision about the vaccine with their parents.

In secondary schools, some young people may be mature enough to provide their own consent. This sometimes occurs if a parent has not returned a consent form but the child still wishes to have the vaccine on the day of the session.

For other vaccination programme such as flu and HPV in secondary schools, there is a well established process. This is when healthcare professionals from the schools immunisation team will speak to the young person and make every effort to contact the parent. These professionals have expertise in vaccinating young people and will be responsible for assessing whether they have enough understanding to self-consent (this is called ‘Gillick competence’).

However for COVID-19 school vaccination, only children who have had written consent from their parents in advance will be vaccinated by the school vaccination service.

This is because the of the way the school service needs to operate quickly, there will not be time to discuss issues around consent.

The school vaccination service will follow up with parents and/or child a later time.

It is important to note that there will be other opportunities for children to be vaccinated should consent/Gillick competence be gained in future. If anyone who has not been vaccinated should change their mind at any point in the future then there is an ‘evergreen’ offer that people can be vaccinated through other local services.

The Green Book of Immunisation contains more information on consent including Gillick competence.

**Can parents refuse to have their child vaccinated?**

Yes. The vaccine is not mandatory. Parents will be asked to give their consent for the vaccine. Parents should be encouraged to speak to their children ahead of time so that there is agreement on consent in advance of the vaccination session.

**Is it safe to have flu and COVID vaccines at the same time?**

Yes. Public Health England advises that there are no safety concerns and that COVID-19 vaccines can be given at the same time as other vaccines, including the nasal flu vaccine. It is standard practice for different vaccines to be given at the same time as each other. This happens frequently with routine childhood vaccinations in the UK and other countries.

**Common side effects**

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short-term and not everyone gets them. The very common side effects should only last a day or 2.

Very common side effects in the first day or 2 include:

* having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection
* feeling tired
* headache, aches and chills
* young people may also have flu-like symptoms with episodes of shivering and shaking for a day or 2
* We suggest that young people should rest and take paracetamol (following the dose advice in the packaging) to help make them feel better.

**Very rare serious side effects**

Worldwide, there have been recent, very rare cases of inflammation of the heart called myocarditis or pericarditis reported after COVID-19 vaccines. Most of these people felt better following rest and simple treatments.

These cases have been seen mostly in younger males and mainly occurred within a few days of the second dose; myocarditis is extremely rare after the first dose of the vaccine.

**Will your child be observed after vaccination?**

Serious allergic reactions to vaccination are very rare but tend to happen within a few minutes of the injection. School age immunisation service teams are all trained to spot and manage allergic reactions and so all children will be observed for 15 minutes.

All school age immunisation service providers will bring the necessary equipment to treat an allergic reaction.

Children with allergies to common food items are not at higher risk of these serious allergies.

**Where you can you more information on the COVID-19 vaccine**

The [NHS leaflets](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-resources-for-children-and-young-people) provide more information for parents and young people on the vaccine, including how it works and what to expect after COVID-19 vaccination. There are accessible versions of the consent form and leaflets available for those with a learning disability or who live with autism. There are braille and British Sign Language (BSL) videos to order or download. Translations are also available.

**How vaccines in schools will work**

Like all school-based vaccination programmes, the vaccines will be administered by the school age immunisation service provider, working closely with the school.

**Eligibility and timing of vaccine**

**Who can have the vaccination and when**

All young people aged 16 to 17 years of age have been offered a first dose of the vaccine.

Young people aged 12 to 17 years who are at increased risk from infection or living with someone who is immunosuppressed have also been offered 2 doses of the vaccine, 8 weeks apart.

All young people aged 12 to 15 years are now being offered a first dose of the vaccine through a school based COVID-19 vaccination programme. If you are 12 years old or more on the day the vaccinations are taking place in school, you will be able to access a vaccine.

As we learn more about COVID-19 and how it responds to the vaccine, there may be future doses given to groups of young people.

If your child does not get the vaccine on the day it is offered in the school

For any young people aged 12 to 15 years who do not receive their vaccine on the vaccine day, there will be catch-up arrangements in place that the school age immunisation service provider will be able to share with the school.

This includes any young person who turns 12 years of age after the day the school age immunisation service provider visits the school.

**If your child has a health condition or is unwell on the day of the vaccine session**

If a young person is unwell on the day, the school age immunisation service provider will decide whether to proceed with vaccination or not. A follow-up offer will be made to any children who miss the first vaccination in their school.

This will help to ensure that the following pupils can access the vaccine:

* if your child turns 12 years of age after the session
* if your child is absent from school on the day
* If your child has recently had a COVID-19 infection
* if you change your mind about whether to have the vaccine or need a bit longer to reach a decision

All questions on the suitability of the vaccine for individual young people should be directed to the school age immunisation service provider delivering the vaccines, who will also be able to share information on these catch-up sessions.

**Your child is home educated and does not attend school, will they be offered a vaccine as part of this programme?**

All young people in the eligible age group who do not attend school, for example those who are home educated or living in secure accommodation, should be offered the vaccine. The school age immunisation service provider will have plans in place to offer vaccines to these young people.

**Your child is over 12 years old but in a further education college, not at school, will they be offered a vaccine as part of this programme?**

Yes. All children in the eligible age group who do not attend school should be offered the vaccine. The school age immunisation service provider will have plans in place to offer vaccination to these children.

**Your child is in a special school, will they be offered a vaccine as part of this programme?**

Yes. School age immunisation service providers are commissioned to vaccinate children in special schools.

**Can a 12 to 15 year old use a COVID-19 walk-in site if this would be quicker?**

Unfortunately, walk-ins from this age group cannot be accepted. Presently there are no plans to make walk-in appointments available.