

COVID-19 IMMUNISATION PROGRAMME FOR 12-15 YEAR OLDS

Frequently asked questions

Why 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 one 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.

What is 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 receiving the vaccine.

Which vaccine is approved for use in this age group?

Children will be offered the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine, which is the vaccine approved by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) for children and young people over 12 years of age. This follows a thorough review of the safety, quality and effectiveness of the vaccine in this age group.

Who will be giving the vaccine to the children?

The programme will be delivered by an NHS commissioned school vaccination service from Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust which may include nurses, healthcare support workers, administrative staff, and other associated professionals who specialise in the delivery of school age vaccinations.

The team will administer the vaccination according to nationally agreed standards. Staff are appropriately qualified, trained (including in safeguarding) and experienced in vaccinating children and young people. Staff administering the vaccine will be wearing appropriate personal protective equipment.

How will the vaccination team identify the children to be vaccinated?

The consent forms will be collected from the school by the school vaccination service. This process may happen electronically or by paper. The school vaccination service will supply paper versions for families who cannot access the digital or email versions. The team will then have a list of all children for whom consent has been received in advance of the immunisation session.

How does the consent process work?

All parents or those with parental responsibility are asked for consent and will usually make this decision, jointly with their children. Parents/guardians will receive a consent form to complete, either in paper format or an electronic consent form via a link distributed by school approximately one week before the school vaccination service's visit to the school.

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 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.

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.

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.

How are schools involved in the consent process?

Whilst schools may host immunisation services, they are not responsible for securing parental or child consent. This is the role of registered nurses in the school vaccination service, who have extensive experience and the expertise to handle these issues and are professionally accountable for their decisions. Legal accountability for offering COVID-19 vaccines to children and young people sits with the school vaccination service and not with the school.

What about those children turning 12 years of age within the school year, after the date of the vaccination session?

The school vaccination service will vaccinate all children aged 12 years and over on the day of the school visit. Young people in Year 7 who are aged 12 years and have consented will be

identified by the school vaccination service and vaccinated at the same session, alongside pupils in Years 8 onwards.

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:

- those turning 12 years after the session
- those who were absent from school on the day
- those who have recently had a COVID-19 infection
- those who subsequently change their minds or take longer to reach a decision

It is anticipated that this will be delivered outside of school settings to minimise any further disruption to education and other immunisation programmes.

What happens if a child has a health condition or is unwell on the day of the vaccination session?

If a child is unwell on the day, the school vaccination service will decide whether to proceed with vaccination or not.

All questions on the suitability of the vaccine for individual children should be directed to the school vaccination service delivering the vaccinations.

For any children who want to be vaccinated but are unable for health or other reasons to have the vaccine on the day, there will be catch-up arrangements in place that the school vaccination service will be able to share with the school.

Why do children have to be observed for 15 minutes after vaccination?

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

The school vaccination service 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.

Will children who are home educated be offered a vaccine as part of this programme?

All children in the eligible age group who do not attend school, for example those who are home educated will be offered the vaccine. The school vaccination service will have plans in place to offer vaccination to these children.

What are the potential 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 two.

Very common side effects in the first day or two 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 two
- 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 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.

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

The [NHS leaflets](#) 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.