



## Coronavirus (COVID-19)

# Vaccination programme for children and young people

## Guidance for parents

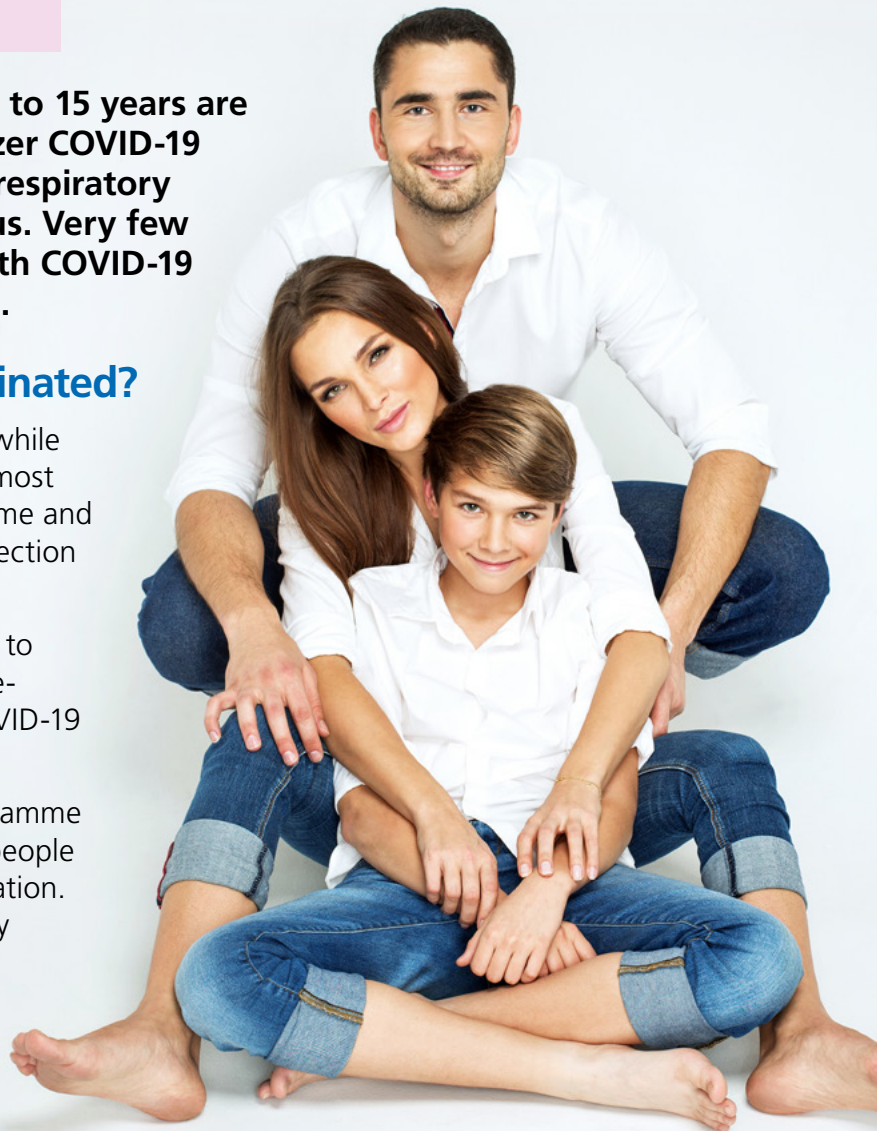
**This autumn all young people aged 12 to 15 years are being offered the first dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 is a very infectious respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Very few healthy children and young people with COVID-19 infection go on to have severe disease.**

### Why should I have my child vaccinated?

The UK's Chief Medical Officers 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 Chief Medical Officers.



# The coronavirus (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 videos explain this in more detail:

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1434441175281274890>

<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 videos explain this in more detail:

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1375364398601039872>

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1421206463297441793>

## 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 my 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 can I find more information on 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. We have braille and BSL videos to order or download. Translations are also available.

## How vaccines in school 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.

### What happens if my 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.

### What happens if my 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.



## **My 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.

## **My 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.

## **My 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.

## **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. The information leaflet 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. Every effort will be made to contact the parent to seek their verbal consent.

This is a well-established process which you will be familiar with from other school-based vaccination programmes.

## **Who decides whether a young person can give their own consent?**

In secondary schools, some young people will be mature enough to provide their own consent. 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').

This is a well-established process which you will be familiar with from other school-based vaccination programmes.

You can read the Green book of immunisation for more information on consent including Gillick competence – [www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2).





## 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. Young people may express a wish to have the vaccine and may have the capacity to provide informed consent themselves. 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.

**If no consent is received, and the young person is not Gillick competent or does not want to be vaccinated, the immunisation will not proceed.**

## What happens if a parent has not consented, but the young person wants to be vaccinated?

Young people who understand fully what is involved in a proposed procedure, such as vaccination, can legally give consent. This is known as 'Gillick competence'.

If no consent from a parent has been received, but the young person wants to be vaccinated and is judged to be Gillick competent by the healthcare professional, the young person can still be vaccinated.

In this case, the school age immunisation service provider will make every effort to contact a parent, to try and reach agreement between the parent and young person. However, the parent cannot overrule the decision of a Gillick competent young person.

You can read the Green book of immunisation for more information on consent including Gillick competence– [www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2).

## Common questions

### My child has allergies, can they have the vaccination?

There are very few children who cannot receive the vaccine.

Prior to vaccination all individuals are issued with a leaflet that outlines safety information about the vaccine. This will include a link to more detailed information about any health conditions that may prevent a young person from receiving vaccination. You can read the 'Information for UK recipients' of the Pfizer vaccines here:

<https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/productinformation>

All young people and their parents or carers should consult their clinician if they have concerns regarding allergies and COVID-19 vaccination.

### I have heard vaccines can cause irregular periods or unexpected bleeding?

Period problems are extremely common and can be caused by a variety of factors including stress and other short-term illnesses. Although some people have reported that their periods were briefly disrupted in the month after vaccination, there is no evidence that this was due to the vaccine.

### Can vaccines effect fertility?

There is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines affect fertility in males or in females. There is some helpful [information](#) on the website of the British Fertility Society.



**Do the vaccines contain alcohol?**

There is no alcohol in the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccines which is the recommended vaccine for young people.

**Do the COVID-19 vaccines contain animal products?**

The MHRA has confirmed that the vaccines do not contain anything of animal origin. All ingredients are published in healthcare information on the MHRA's website.

This video provides more information:

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1387368497517236234>

**Is the vaccine suitable for young people who are vegan/vegetarian friendly, Muslim or Jewish?**

The Pfizer vaccine does not contain any meat derivatives, animal products or any egg.

The British Islamic Medical Association have produced a helpful guide which can be found at <https://britishima.org/operation-vaccination/hub/>.

**Do the vaccines contain COVID-19?**

No, the vaccines do not contain any live virus.

## Further Information

If you have questions about the vaccine, please speak to the school age immunisation service provider. You will get their contact details with the information and consent form.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or distressed by the decision or COVID-19, please get support from [www.nhs.uk/mental-health/nhs-voluntary-charity-services/charity-and-voluntary-services/get-help-from-mental-health-helplines](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/nhs-voluntary-charity-services/charity-and-voluntary-services/get-help-from-mental-health-helplines).

Additional information for parents and children to have conversations about the COVID-19 vaccine for 12 to 15 year olds, including how it works and what to expect after COVID-19 vaccination, is available on the following link: [COVID-19 vaccination: resources for children and young people – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-vaccination-resources-for-children-and-young-people).



**Vaccination, helping to protect those most vulnerable.**