

**From the Chief Medical Officer
Prof Sir Michael McBride**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 56/2021

FOR ACTION

Chief Executives HSC Trusts

*for onward cascade to Medical Directors, and Trust
Vaccine Leads*

Chief Executive, Public Health Agency and Health and
Social Care Board/NIAS *for onward cascade as
appropriate*

Assistant Director of General Medical Services, Health
and Social Care Board *for onward cascade to All General
Practitioners, GP Locums and Practice Staff
OOHs Medical Managers*

Assistant Director of Pharmacy and Medicines
Management, Health and Social Care Board *for onward
cascade to Community Pharmacies*

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Our Ref: HSS(MD) 56/2021

Date: 6 August 2021

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleague

**FURTHER UPDATED ADVICE FROM JCVI REGARDING CHILDREN AGED 16
AND 17 YEARS OF AGE**

1. Further to our letter of the 3 August, HSS(MD) 54/2021 refers, we are writing to you to advise that the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) have now issued additional advice in relation to children aged 12-17 years of age. See attached link to the full JCVI statement – <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-of-children-and-young-people-aged-12-to-17-years-jcvi-statement/jcvi-statement-on-covid-19-vaccination-of-children-and-young-people-aged-12-to-17-years-15-july-2021>
2. In making their decision JCVI have taken into account:
 - a) the incidence and severity of suspected adverse events following vaccination,
 - b) the potential impacts of COVID-19 vaccination on the delivery of other school-based immunisations,

- c) the potential protection provided by vaccination against severe COVID-19 (hospitalisations and deaths), Paediatric Inflammatory Multisystem Syndrome temporally associated with SARS-CoV-2 (PIMS-TS) and post-COVID-19 syndrome,
 - d) the mental health and educational impacts of COVID-19,
 - e) the seroprevalence of SARS-CoV2 infection in the UK,
 - f) mathematical models of the impact of COVID-19 vaccination on the epidemiology of the pandemic, and
 - g) the differential impacts of potential harms and benefits on children and young people from more disadvantaged or deprived backgrounds.
3. When formulating advice in relation to childhood immunisations, JCVI has consistently held that the main focus of its decision should be the benefit to children and young people themselves, weighed against any potential harms from vaccination to children and young people.
 4. At this time, the Pfizer-BioNTech BNT162b2 vaccine is the only vaccine authorised for persons aged 12 – 17 years in the UK. The Conditional Marketing Authorisation for Pfizer-BioNTech BNT162b2 came into effect on 9 July 2021, with approval previously being provided under Regulation 174. JCVI advises that only UK authorised COVID-19 vaccines should be offered to those aged less than 18 years.
 5. Efficacy of the Pfizer-BNT162b2 vaccine against symptomatic COVID-19 was 100% in the clinical trial involving persons aged 12 – 15 years. The trial was too small to assess the efficacy against severe COVID-19 in 12 – 15 year olds.
 6. In recent weeks, reports have been submitted in the UK and other countries of the extremely rare occurrence of myocarditis (inflammation of the heart muscle) and pericarditis (inflammation of the membrane around the heart), following the use of Pfizer-BioNTech BNT162b2 and Moderna mRNA- 1273 vaccines. These extremely rare adverse reactions have been more frequent shortly after the second dose, and in younger individuals and males; data from the United States indicate about 60 reported cases per million second doses in younger males, with reporting rates after the first dose being 6 to 7-fold lower.
 7. For adults aged 18 years and over, JCVI considers that the potential benefits of vaccination with Pfizer-BNT162b2 continue to outweigh potential harms. For persons aged <18 years old who do not have underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe COVID-19, there is more uncertainty in the precision of the harm-benefit balance when considering the impacts on children and young people themselves. As with adults, age has a strong influence. In general, older children are more likely to benefit from vaccination compared to younger children.
 8. **At this time, JCVI advises that all 16 – 17-year olds should be offered a first dose of Pfizer-BNT162b2 vaccine.** This is in addition to the existing offer of two doses of vaccine to 16 – 17 year olds who are in ‘at-risk’ groups.

Pending further evidence on effectiveness and safety in this age group, a second vaccine dose is anticipated to be offered later to increase the level of protection and contribute towards longer term protection. Further data and the potential availability of alternative vaccine options will inform exact details which will be provided in a subsequent update of this advice before second doses are due at approximately 12 weeks after the first dose.

9. In Northern Ireland all 16 and 17 year olds i.e. those born between 1 August 2003 and the 31 August 2005 will now be eligible to receive the first dose of the Pfizer-BNT162b2 vaccine **from Friday 6 August**. All those attending for vaccination must have reached their 16th birthday. As the Pfizer-BNT162b2 vaccine has only been deployed in Trusts, these children can receive the vaccine by either attending a walk-in session at a Trust vaccination centre or at one of the mobile vaccination clinics currently operating across NI. The online booking platform will also be amended to allow all 16 and 17 year olds to make an appointment at a Trust centre.
10. As a result of the COVID-19 vaccination programme coming to an end and in advance of a COVID-19 booster programme potentially starting in September, this will be a time bound offer of vaccination and 16 and 17 year olds will be advised to receive their vaccine **by the 31 August**.
11. As previously advised by JCVI and as mentioned in HSS(MD) 54/2021, those children who were within 3 months of their 18th birthday were eligible for vaccination. In Northern Ireland, the cut-off point for first doses was the 31 July 2021 and therefore the cut-off for those turning 18 was taken as the 31 October 2021. **These individuals should continue to be offered two doses of Pfizer-BNT162b2 vaccine with an interval of eight weeks between doses**
12. As set out in HSS(MD) 54/2021, persons aged 12 – 15 years with specific underlying health conditions that put them at risk of severe COVID-19, should be offered two doses of Pfizer-BNT162b2 vaccine with an interval of eight weeks between doses. Children and young people aged 12 years and over who are household contacts of persons (adults or children) who are immunosuppressed should be offered two doses of Pfizer-BNT162b2 vaccine with an interval of eight weeks between doses.
13. We fully appreciate all of your continued efforts in ensuring the COVID-19 vaccination programme is implemented and those eligible are able to receive their vaccination.

Yours sincerely



pp Prof Sir Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Prof Charlotte McArdle
Chief Nursing Officer

Mrs Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

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This letter is available on the Department of Health website at
<https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/topics/professional-medical-and-environmental-health-advice/hssmd-letters-and-urgent-communications>