

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



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnstríe O Poustie

www.health-ni.gov.uk

HSS(MD) 54/2021

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) 54/2021

Date: 3 August 2021

PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION LIST

Dear Colleague

UPDATED JCVI ADVICE RE CHILDREN 12-17 YEARS OF AGE

1. We are writing to you following the updated independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) guidance in relation to COVID-19 vaccinations for children and young people issued on the 19 July and to update you on how this advice will be implemented in Northern Ireland:

<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. The guidance states:

- a) *“A small number of children and young people with underlying chronic conditions are at increased risk of serious COVID-19 disease.*

JCVI advises that children and young people aged 12 years and over with specific underlying health conditions that put them at risk of serious COVID-19, should be offered COVID-19 vaccination.

Government advisers are currently reviewing evidence on the risk of COVID-19 in children and young people considered clinically extremely vulnerable. Once this review has reported, the finding will be considered by JCVI and will inform further guidance.

At the current time, children 12 to 15 years of age with severe neuro-disabilities, Down's syndrome, underlying conditions resulting in immunosuppression, and those with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD), severe learning disabilities or who are on the learning disability register are considered at increased risk for serious COVID-19 disease and should be offered COVID-19 vaccination.

- b) Young people aged 16 to 17 years of age who are at higher risk of serious COVID-19, as currently set out in the Green Book, should continue to be offered COVID-19 vaccination.**

Further details regarding other specific underlying health conditions for which an offer of COVID-19 vaccination is advised will be provided in the Green Book: Immunisation against infectious disease.

Persons who are immunosuppressed are at higher risk of serious disease from COVID-19 and may not generate a full immune response to vaccination.

- c) JCVI advises that children and young people aged 12 years and over who are household contacts of persons (adults or children) who are immunosuppressed should be offered COVID-19 vaccination on the understanding that the main benefits from vaccination are related to the potential for indirect protection of their household contact who is immunosuppressed**

Clear information on the potential risks and benefits of vaccination should be provided to the child and those with parental responsibility prior to vaccination.

Until more data become available, JCVI does not currently advise routine universal vaccination of children and young people less than 18 years of age. JCVI will keep this advice under review as more safety and effectiveness information become available on the use of COVID-19 vaccines in children and young people.

The health benefits in this population are small, and the benefits to the wider population are highly uncertain. At this time, JCVI is of the view that the health benefits of universal vaccination in children and young people below the age of 18 years do not outweigh the potential risks.

- d) **Operationally, it is considered reasonable to allow a lead-in time to offer vaccination to those children who are within three months of their 18th birthday to ensure good uptake of vaccine in newly-turned 18 year olds.**”
3. Plans to vaccinate children who fall into the categories above have now been put into operation in Northern Ireland as follows:
- a. The PHA have established a regional group which includes a Paediatrician from each Trust to identify those children aged 12-15 years of age who fall into the groups currently identified by JCVI. These children will shortly be invited to attend a dedicated vaccination centre at either a special school or Trust vaccination centre.
 - b. Young people aged 16/17 years of age who in an ‘at risk’ group have previously been identified by their GP/Consultant and issued with a letter to receive a vaccination at one of the Trust vaccination centres. This position remains unchanged.
 - c. GPs/Trusts are in the process of issuing letters to the households of anyone who is immunosuppressed advising them that those aged 12-15 years of age who stay at the same address can now book a vaccination at one of the regional Trust centres. This position will be unaffected by the closing of the Trust centres for first doses from the 1 August.
 - d. The booking platform had been amended to allow anyone who would be 18 years of age by the 31 October 2021 to book a vaccination slot at one of the Trust vaccination centres. Now that the vaccination centres are no longer routinely administering first doses, those eligible will continue to be able to receive their vaccine at via a Trust mobile clinic using the Pfizer vaccine.

Continued offer to adults

4. We are committed to ensuring that all adults have been offered the opportunity to be vaccinated. This means the focus must remain on doing everything we can to ensure as many people as possible, especially those 18-29 year olds who have not yet come forward, receive their first dose, as well as maintaining an unrelenting focus on second dose delivery throughout the rest of the summer. While Trust centres have ceased routinely offering first doses, vaccination will still be available for the younger age cohorts via Trust mobile clinics or those community pharmacies administering the Moderna vaccine.
5. In line with the updated Green Book guidance and HSS(MD) 52/2021, second dose vaccinations should not be offered earlier than 8 weeks..

6. Together we have delivered in Northern Ireland a proven vaccine programme safely, comprehensively and at scale. We know your remarkable endeavours to date are enormously appreciated and will continue to be so.

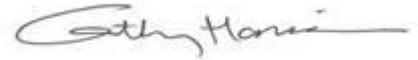
Yours sincerely



Prof Sir Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Pro Charlotte McArdle
Chief Nursing Officer



Mrs Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

Circulation List

Director of Public Health/Medical Director, Public Health Agency (*for onward distribution to all relevant health protection staff*)
Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
Directors of Pharmacy HSC Trusts
Director of Social Care and Children, HSCB
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Directors of Children's Services, HSC Trusts
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Trade Union Side
Clinical Advisory Team
Louise McMahon, Director of Integrated Care, HSCB

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>

