

Chief Medical Officers to consider vaccinating people aged 12 to 15 following JCVI advice

The four Chief Medical Officers will provide further advice on the COVID-19 vaccination of young people aged 12 to 15 with COVID-19 vaccines following the advice of the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

The independent medicines regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), has approved the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines for people aged 12 and over after they met strict standards of safety and effectiveness.

The JCVI has advised that the health benefits from vaccination are marginally greater than the potential known harms. It has advised the government to seek further input from the Chief Medical Officers on the wider impacts.

This includes the impact on schools and young people's education, which has been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

UK health ministers from across the four nations have today written to the Chief Medical Officers to request they begin the process of assessing the broader impact of universal COVID-19 vaccination in this age group.

They will now convene experts and senior leaders in clinical and public health to consider the issue. They will then present their advice to ministers on whether a universal programme should be taken forward.

People aged 12 to 15 who are clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 or who live with adults who are at increased risk of serious illness from the virus are already eligible for a COVID-19 vaccine and are being contacted by the NHS, to be invited to come forward. The JCVI has advised that this offer should be expanded to include more children aged 12 to 15, for example those with sickle cell disease or type 1 diabetes.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Our COVID-19 vaccines have brought a wide range of benefits to the country, from saving lives and preventing hospitalisations, to helping stop infections and allowing children to return to school.

I am grateful for the expert advice that I have received from the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation.

People aged 12 to 15 who are clinically vulnerable to the virus have already been offered a COVID-19 vaccine, and today we'll be expanding the offer to those with conditions such as sickle cell

disease or type 1 diabetes to protect even more vulnerable children.

Along with Health Ministers across the four nations, I have today written to the Chief Medical Officers to ask that they consider the vaccination of 12 to 15 year olds from a broader perspective, as suggested by the JCVI.

We will then consider the advice from the Chief Medical Officers, building on the advice from the JCVI, before making a decision shortly.

Scottish Health Minister Humza Yousaf said:

I want to thank the JCVI for today's advice regarding vaccination for 12 -15 year olds.

While the JCVI has agreed that the benefits marginally outweigh the risks they are not yet prepared to recommend universal vaccination of 12-15 year olds, however, they have suggested that Health Ministers may wish to ask their respective CMOs to explore the issue further, taking into consideration broader educational and societal impacts. Therefore, I have agreed with the other three UK Health Ministers to write a letter asking the four Chief Medical Officers to consider this latest guidance and explore whether there is additional evidence to suggest it would be beneficial to offer vaccination to all 12 – 15 year olds. We have asked for this further work to be conducted as soon as possible.

A further update will be issued once these discussions have taken place.

In the meantime, we will offer the vaccine to those children and young people currently recommended.

The recent increase in cases of COVID-19 means it remains crucial that everyone who is offered a vaccination takes up the offer.

Northern Ireland Health Minister Robin Swann:

I welcome the extension of the vaccination programme to include a wider group of children aged 12-15 years of age with underlying medical conditions. The importance of vaccination is evident and I would urge those who are eligible to get vaccinated as soon as possible to help protect themselves and those around them.

I am also grateful for the JCVI advice on 12-15 year olds and agree that this issue warrants further consideration. It is entirely appropriate that our most senior medical advisers take forward this

piece of work urgently. I look forward to seeing their considerations in the near future.

Welsh Government Health Minister Eluned Morgan said:

I would like to thank the JCVI for fully considering the issue of vaccinating 12-15 year olds and for taking the care to form a balanced view. Our intention as it has been from the start of the pandemic is to follow the science and evidence, and I have asked my Chief Medical Officer to provide guidance at the earliest opportunity on the clinical and wider health benefits of vaccinating this age group.

The Health and Social Care Secretary, Sajid Javid, has asked the NHS to put preparations in place to roll out vaccinations to 12 to 15 year olds, should it be recommended by the Chief Medical Officers.

If this group is offered the vaccine, parental or carer consent will be sought, just as with other school immunisation programmes.

The vaccination programme has so far provided protection to over 48 million people over the age of 16 across the UK – including over 48 million first doses and over 43 million second doses.

The latest data from Public Health England and Cambridge University shows vaccines have saved more than 105,000 lives and prevented 143,600 hospitalisations and 24 million cases in England.