

Covid 19 Vaccine Update from the Health Secretary

I have received the enclosed letter from the Health Secretary regarding on the latest Covid 19 vaccine update:

COVID-19 Vaccine Update – Children and Young People

I am writing to you to update you on the latest developments on our deployment of COVID-19 vaccines.

The national COVID-19 vaccination programme has been a great success with 126 million COVID-19 vaccines administered to date. The programme has prevented 127,500 deaths and 24,144,000 infections as of 24 September 2021.

The advice provided by the independent Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) to the Government during the COVID-19 pandemic has been invaluable in ensuring a safe, effective, and successful vaccination programme in the UK.

As you will be aware, in response to the emergence of the Omicron variant in the UK, I accepted advice from the JCVI on 29 November 2021 that all children and young people aged 12 to 15 years should be offered a second dose COVID-19 vaccine at a minimum of 12 weeks from the first dose. In this advice, it was noted that no vaccine was at the time authorised in the UK for use in children aged 5 to 11 years.

Following a careful review of the relative balance of risks and benefits of vaccination, the JCVI have updated their advice on children and young people issued 29 November 2021.

The JCVI now advise that children aged five to 11 years in a clinical risk group or who are a household contact of someone who is immunosuppressed (both as defined in the UK Health Security Agency Green Book), should be offered two 10 micrograms doses of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine with an interval of eight weeks between the first and second doses. The minimum interval between any vaccine dose and recent COVID-19 infection should be four weeks.

A new paediatric formulation of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine for use in children aged 5 to 11 years old has been approved for use in the UK today (22 December) by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) after finding that it is safe and effective.

This approval was given following a robust review of safety data that shows a positive benefit-risk profile for this vaccine to be used in this age group. The JCVI will issue further advice regarding COVID-19 vaccination for other five- to 11-year-olds in due course following consideration of additional data.

Moreover, the JCVI now advises an expansion of the booster programme to include:

- All children and young people aged 16 to 17 years;
- Children and young people aged 12 to 15 who are in a clinical risk group or who are a household contact of someone who is immunosuppressed, and
- Children and young people aged 12 to 15 years who are severely immunosuppressed and who have had a third primary dose.

The JCVI advise that these groups should be offered a booster dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine no sooner than 3 months after completion of their primary course. Prioritisation of booster vaccination within eligible cohorts will generally be in the order of descending age groups, or clinical risk, whichever is more expedient. The JCVI will continue to review new data and consider whether to recommend further vaccination of under-16s without underlying health conditions in a timely manner.

In accepting this most recent JCVI advice, I pay tribute to the tireless work of the Committee in negotiating the emerging science and data and making recommendations that are in the clinical best interest of patients.

I have directed the NHS to plan for operationalising this advice in the new year, as our immediate focus continues to be the national mission to offer COVID-19 booster vaccinations to all adults by the end of this year.

As with all groups that have been offered the vaccine, the considerations of risks from COVID-19 have been assessed against vaccination. This means that the parents and guardians of those called to receive the vaccine can be confident the decision made by them is the right one for their child.

It is essential that we and our constituents continue to play our part in the UK's COVID-19 response and protect the country from the virus by coming forward for vaccination when contacted by the NHS. I would like to thank you all for your efforts to encourage your constituents to be vaccinated. I wish to conclude by once again encouraging all in the UK, when eligible, to get their jab.

Yours

SAJID JAVID MP