

People urged to get booster jabs to keep your family protected this Christmas

- People aged 40 to 49 can book their booster jab from Monday if eligible, and 16-17 year olds their second dose, as national booking service opens
- Eligible people urged to get COVID-19 booster vaccines ahead of Christmas
- Call comes as cases rise in Europe and some countries introduce further restrictions
- Almost 15 million boosters have been administered in UK

From tomorrow, the National Booking Service will open to people aged 40-49 for their booster jab, and young people aged 16-17 for their second jab.

Booster jabs and second doses will protect the progress we have already made through our phenomenal vaccination programme, ensuring we can enjoy Christmas safely. People are encouraged to come forward for their jabs as soon as they are eligible to get the best possible protection ahead of winter.

New data this week further highlighted how important the booster jab is. The first real-world study on the effectiveness of booster vaccines by the UK Health Security Agency shows top-up jabs boost protection back up to over 90% against symptomatic COVID-19 in adults aged over 50.

The findings shows that two weeks after receiving a booster dose, protection against symptomatic infection in adults aged 50 years and over was 93.1% in those with Oxford/AstraZeneca as their primary course and 94.0% for Pfizer-BioNTech.

This means people who have had their booster vaccine by 11 December will have very high protection against COVID-19 by Christmas Day. Following a rise in cases and a return of lockdown restrictions in Europe, those eligible for a booster have been urged to take up the offer as soon as possible to protect themselves, their families and help to reduce the pressure on the NHS.

Following new advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) this week, the vaccination programme has extended, with over 40s eligible for boosters and people aged 16 and 17 able to book a second jab.

Those eligible for a booster can book an appointment in advance – five months after their second dose – to be vaccinated as soon as they reach the six month mark, and the National Booking Service opens tomorrow to those over 40 and young people aged 16-17.

Almost 6 in 10 young people aged 16 to 17 have already had a first dose in England, protecting them from COVID-19, reducing transmission and helping to reduce the amount of missed education. Second doses will top-up this protection even further during the winter months.

People can book by calling 119 or get vaccinated at hundreds of walk-in sites across the country six months after their second dose without an appointment. Those eligible can use the NHS online walk-in finder to locate the most convenient site.

Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Getting your COVID-19 booster vaccine is the best way to keep yourself and your loved ones safe this winter and will help reduce the pressure on the NHS.

While the government is continuing to monitor a wide range of data to ensure the country remains protected, we have very sadly seen a surge in cases in parts of Europe.

The most important thing we can do to stop a similar rise in this country is get the jab – so please get your vaccines as soon as you can so we can keep the virus at bay.

A total of 14 million people in the UK have already received their booster vaccines, securing crucial protection ahead of the winter.

More than 50 million first doses (88.2%) and 46 million second doses (80.2%) have been given across the UK.

Vaccines Minister Maggie Throup said:

We must protect the gains we have made through our vaccination programme this winter, and I urge everybody to help make this happen

Please get your boosters when eligible, and get your first and second doses if you haven't already, to secure vital protection during the winter to keep you and your loved ones safe.

Vaccines give high levels of protection but immunity reduces over time, particularly for older adults and at-risk groups, so it is vital that vulnerable people come forward to get their COVID-19 booster vaccine to top up their defences and protect themselves this winter.

The latest evidence from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) shows that protection against symptomatic disease falls from 65%, up to three months after the second dose, to 45% six months after the second dose for the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, and from 90% to 65% for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Protection against hospitalisation falls from 95% to 75% for Oxford/AstraZeneca and 99% to 90% for Pfizer/BioNTech.

Although the vaccine effectiveness against severe disease remains high, a small change can generate a major shift in hospital admissions. For example,

a change from 95% to 90% protection against hospitalisation would lead to doubling of admissions in those vaccinated.

The booster programme is designed to top up this waning immunity.

It is also never too late if you have not yet had a first or second dose – getting your COVID-19 vaccine is the single best way to protect yourself and your loved ones this winter.

COVID-19 booster vaccines have been delivered or booked in at every older adult care home in England where safe to do so, with almost 9 in 10 care homes already visited.

Last month, clinical guidance was updated to enable boosters to be given slightly earlier to those at highest risk, where this makes operational sense to do so. This includes care home residents who may have received their second doses at different times to be vaccinated in the same session, as long as it has been 5 months since their second dose. It may also help with other vulnerable groups, such as housebound patients, so that they can have their flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time.

Dr Emily Lawson, head of the NHS COVID-19 Vaccination Programme, said:

The NHS vaccination programme continues to roll out at scale with more than 12 million boosters delivered in England – including around seven in 10 eligible people aged 50 and over – and 14 million UK wide in nine weeks.

In the run up to the festive period and what we know will be a challenging winter, I would encourage everyone who is eligible and invited to take up the offer of a life-saving booster as soon as possible to protect yourself and those around you.

Vaccine confidence is high, with data from the Office for National Statistics showing nearly all (94%) of those aged 50 to 69 say they would be likely to get their COVID-19 booster if offered, with the figure rising to 98% for those over 70.

Flu is another winter virus that can be serious. To give people the best protection over winter, those eligible for a free flu vaccine should come forward and book an appointment at either their GP practice or their local pharmacy, or take it up when offered by their employer or other healthcare provider.

The government has launched a nationwide advertising campaign, encouraging people eligible to get their booster and flu jabs to protect themselves and their loved ones and help reduce pressures on the NHS. This includes outdoor billboards, broadcast and community radio and TV.

The offer of a first and second COVID-19 vaccine remains open to anyone who is eligible. Vaccines are available free of charge and from thousands of

vaccine centres, GP practices and pharmacies. Around 98% of people live within 10 miles of a vaccination centre in England and vaccinations are taking place at sites including mosques, community centres and football stadiums.

There are more than 500 extra vaccination sites now compared to April this year, with 1,697 vaccination centres in operation in April 2021, and over 2,200 vaccination centres in operation now.

Vaccines are also available for those aged 12 to 15 to offer the best possible protection this winter in schools, as well as more than 200 vaccine centres.