# Coronavirus (COVID-19)

# Vaccination programme for children and young people

## Guidance for parents

This autumn all young people aged 12 to 15 years are being offered the first dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine. COVID-19 is a very infectious respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. Very few healthy children and young people with COVID-19 infection go on to have severe disease.

### Why should my child have the COVID-19 vaccine?

The UK’s Chief Medical Officers all agree that while COVID-19 is typically mild or asymptomatic in most young people, it can be very unpleasant for some and one dose of the vaccine will provide good protection against severe illness and hospitalisation.

Vaccinating 12 to 15 year olds should also help to reduce the need for young people to have time off school and reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 within schools.

The COVID-19 secondary schools vaccine programme should therefore provide protection to young people and reduce the disruption to face to face education. This will help to keep young people emotionally well and happier and this was an important consideration for the Chief Medical Officers. See Further information on page 7.

## The coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine

The COVID-19 vaccine helps to reduce the chance of COVID-19 infection and provides good protection against serious disease. It may take a few weeks to build up some protection from the first dose of vaccine.

### How does the vaccine work?

The Pfizer vaccine is an mRNA-based COVID-19 vaccine. It works by introducing a molecule (mRNA) into the body which instructs the body’s cells to build a protein similar to those found in the virus that causes COVID-19. The protein is then recognised by the immune system, which produces antibodies that will provide protection against COVID-19 infection.

The mRNA is read by cells, similar to us reading an instruction manual, and instructs them to make specific proteins which mount an immune response in the body, helping to protect it against the virus. The mRNA is destroyed within days by your body. It will not be incorporated into your DNA.

### Is it safe for young people?

The medicines regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), has confirmed the Pfizer vaccine is safe and effective for 12 to 17 year olds.

This followed a rigorous review of the safety, quality and effectiveness of the vaccines in this age group.

The UK has also benefited from having data from the US, Canada and Israel, which have already offered vaccines universally to young people aged 12 to 15 years.

These videos explain this in more detail:

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1434441175281274890>

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1405246298320637960>

### How were the vaccines developed so quickly?

All vaccines have had 3 stages of clinical trials and were tested on tens of thousands of people around the world. The trial phases were run in parallel, speeding up the overall time of vaccine production, but not the critical research time. Since December 2020 the Pfizer vaccine has been given to millions of people in the UK and has an excellent safety record.

These videos explain this in more detail:

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1375364398601039872>

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1421206463297441793>

### Common side effects

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short-term and not everyone gets them. The very common side effects should only last a day or 2.

Very common side effects in the first day or 2 include:

* having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection
* feeling tired
* headache, aches and chills
* young people may also have flu-like symptoms with episodes of shivering and shaking for a day or 2

We suggest that young people should rest and take paracetamol (following the dose advice in the packaging) to help make them feel better.

### Very rare serious side effects

Worldwide, there have been recent, very rare cases of inflammation of the heart called myocarditis or pericarditis reported after COVID-19 vaccines. Most of these people felt better following rest and simple treatments.

These cases have been seen mostly in younger males and mainly occurred within a few days of the second dose; myocarditis is extremely rare after the first dose of the vaccine.

### Will my child be observed after vaccination?

Serious allergic reactions to vaccination are very rare but tend to happen within a few minutes of the injection. School nursing teams are all trained to spot and manage allergic reactions and so all children will be observed for 15 minutes.

All school nursing teams will bring the necessary equipment to treat an allergic reaction. Children with allergies to common food items are not at higher risk of these serious allergies.

### Where can I find more information on COVID-19 vaccine?

The PHA leaflets provide more information for parents and young people on the vaccine, including what to expect after COVID-19 vaccination.

Visit [www.pha.site/covid-vaccine-schools](http://www.pha.site/covid-vaccine-schools) for the latest information leaflets and alternative formats.

## How will vaccinations be rolled out in schools?

Like all school-based vaccination programmes, the vaccines will be administered by the school nursing teams, working closely with the school.

### Who can have the vaccination and when?

All young people aged 16 to 17 years of age are now being offered two doses of the vaccine.

Young people aged 12 to 17 years who are at increased risk from infection or living with someone who is immunosuppressed have been offered 2 doses of the vaccine, at least 8 weeks apart.

All young people aged 12 to 15 years are now being offered a first dose of the vaccine through a school based COVID-19 vaccination programme. If you are 12 years old or above on the day the vaccinations are taking place in school, you will be able to access a vaccine.

As we learn more about COVID-19 and how it responds to the vaccine, there may be future doses given to groups of young people.

### What happens if my child does not get the vaccine on the day it is offered in the school?

For any young people aged 12 to 15 years who do not receive their vaccine on the vaccine day, there will be catch-up arrangements in place that the school nursing teams will be able to share with the school.

This includes any young person who turns 12 years of age after the day the school nursing team visits the school.

### What happens if my child has a health condition or is unwell on the day of the vaccine session?

If a young person is unwell on the day, the school nursing teams will decide whether to proceed with vaccination or not.

A follow-up offer will be made to any children who miss the first vaccination in their school. This will help to ensure that your child will still be able to access the vaccine if:

* your child turns 12 years of age after the session
* your child is absent from school on the day
* your child has recently had a COVID-19 infection
* your child has had a positive COVID test within the last 12 weeks or the last 4 weeks if your child is at higher risk
* you change your mind about whether to have the vaccine or need a bit longer to reach a decision

All questions on the suitability of the vaccine for individual young people should be directed to the school nursing teams delivering the vaccines, who will also be able to share information on these catch-up sessions.

### My child is home educated and does not attend school, will they be offered a vaccine as part of this programme?

All young people in the eligible age group who do not attend school, for example those who are home educated or living in secure accommodation, should be offered the vaccine.

The school nursing teams will have plans in place to offer vaccines to these young people.

### My child is over 12 years old but in a further education college, not at school, will they be offered a vaccine as part of this programme?

Yes. All children in the eligible age group who do not attend school should be offered the vaccine. The school nursing teams will have plans in place to offer vaccination to these children.

### My child is in a special school, will they be offered a vaccine as part of this programme?

Yes. School nursing teams are commissioned to vaccinate children in special schools.

### Can a 12 to 15 year old use a COVID-19 walk-in site if this would be quicker?

Unfortunately, walk-ins from this age group cannot be accepted. Presently there are no plans to make walk-in appointments available.

### How does the consent process work?

All parents, or those with parental responsibility, are asked for consent and will usually make this decision jointly with their children. The information leaflet is addressed to the child (as the recipient of the vaccine) and encourages them to discuss the decision about the vaccine with their parents.

In secondary schools, some young people may be mature enough to provide their own consent. This sometimes occurs if a parent has not returned a consent form but the child still wishes to have the vaccine. Every effort will be made to contact the parent to seek their verbal consent. If the nursing team is unable to contact the parents, they will only discuss the benefits of the vaccine with the child and establish their understanding of the facts. They will then encourage the child to speak to their parent again. On the rare occasion that the child wishes to proceed alternative arrangements will be made with their GP.

This is a well-established process which you will be familiar with from other school-based vaccination programmes.

### Who decides whether a young person can give their own consent?

In secondary schools, some young people will be mature enough to provide their own consent. Healthcare professionals from the schools nursing team will speak to the young person and make every effort to contact the parent. These professionals have expertise in vaccinating young people and will be responsible for assessing whether they have enough understanding to self-consent (this is called ‘Gillick competence’).

This is a well-established process which you will be familiar with from other school-based vaccination programmes.

You can read the Green book of immunisation for more information on consent including Gillick competence – [www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2)

### Can parents decline to have their child vaccinated?

Yes. The vaccine is not mandatory. Parents will be asked to give their consent for the vaccine. Young people may express a wish to have the vaccine and may have the capacity to provide informed consent themselves. Parents should be encouraged to speak to their children ahead of time so that there is agreement on consent in advance of the vaccination session.

If no consent is received, and the young person is not Gillick competent or does not want to be vaccinated, the immunisation will not proceed.

### What happens if a parent has not consented, but the young person wants to be vaccinated?

Young people who understand fully what is involved in a proposed procedure, such as vaccination, can legally give consent. This is known as ‘Gillick competence’.

If no consent from a parent has been received, but the young person wants to be vaccinated, the school nurse will discuss the benefits of the vaccine with the child and establish their understanding of the facts on the day of the session.

The school nursing teams will make every effort to contact a parent, to try and reach agreement between the parent and young person. However, the parent cannot overrule the decision of a Gillick competent young person.

You can read the Green book of immunisation for more information on consent including Gillick competence – [www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2)

## Common questions

### My child has allergies, can they have the vaccination?

There are very few children who cannot receive the vaccine.

You can read the ‘Information for UK recipients’ of the Pfizer vaccines here:

<https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/productinformation>

This outlines safety information about the vaccine and more detailed information about any health conditions that may prevent a young person from receiving vaccination.

All young people and their parents or carers should consult their school nursing teams if they have concerns regarding allergies and COVID-19 vaccination.

### Can vaccines cause irregular periods or unexpected bleeding?

Period problems are extremely common and can be caused by a variety of factors including stress and other short-term illnesses. Although some people have reported that their periods were briefly disrupted in the month after vaccination, there is no evidence that this was due to the vaccine.

### Can vaccines affect fertility?

There is no evidence that COVID-19 vaccines affect fertility in males or in females. There is some helpful information on the website of the British Fertility Society.

If you have questions about the vaccine, please speak to the school nursing team. You will get their contact details with the information and consent form.

### Do the vaccines contain alcohol?

There is no alcohol in the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine which is the recommended vaccine for young people.

### Do the COVID-19 vaccines contain animal products?

The MHRA has confirmed that the vaccines do not contain anything of animal origin. All ingredients are published in healthcare information on the MHRA’s website.

This video provides more information:

<https://twitter.com/DHSCgovuk/status/1387368497517236234>

### Is the vaccine suitable for young people who are vegan/vegetarian, Muslim or Jewish?

The Pfizer vaccine does not contain any meat derivatives, animal products or any egg.

The British Islamic Medical Association have produced a helpful guide which can be found at <https://britishima.org/operation-vaccination/hub/>

### Do the vaccines contain COVID-19?

No, the vaccines do not contain any live virus.

### Can my child get the COVID-19 vaccine at the same time as the flu vaccine?

The flu vaccine will be offered to all children in Year 8 up to and including Year 12 in secondary school, and children aged 16 and 17 years with underlying health conditions.

If your child is offered both vaccines, it’s safe to have them at the same time.

It is more important than ever to get vaccinated this year as research shows that for some people, contracting COVID-19 and flu virus increases the risk of complications, which could be fatal.

### How is the vaccination recorded?

At the time of vaccination your child will receive a COVID-19 vaccination record card which will include details of the vaccination given. Please keep this record card safe. Vaccination details will also be recorded electronically.

If you need to seek advice from a doctor or nurse, make sure you tell them about the vaccination (show them the vaccination card, if possible) so that they can assess your child properly.

### Further Information

Advice from the UK CMOs on vaccination for 12 to 15s is available here: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-vaccination-of-children-and-young-people-aged-12-to-15-years-against-covid-19](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-vaccination-of-children-and-young-people-aged-12-to-15-years-against-covid-19)

Also find more information at [www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine)

If you have questions about the vaccine, please speak to the school nursing teams.

If you are feeling overwhelmed or distressed by the decision or COVID-19, please get support from [www.nhs.uk/mental-health/nhs-voluntary-charity-services/charity-and-voluntary-services/get-help-from-mental-health-helplines](http://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/nhs-voluntary-charity-services/charity-and-voluntary-services/get-help-from-mental-health-helplines)

Additional information for parents and children to have conversations about the COVID-19 vaccine for 12 to 15 year olds may be added to the online version of this document: please check the latest version of this and other patient leaflets on the PHA website [www.pha.site/covid-vaccine-schools](http://www.pha.site/covid-vaccine-schools)

### Vaccination, helping to protect those most vulnerable.

Published November 2021 by the Public Health Agency.

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