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Coronavirus vaccination programme - statement

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It is essential that the COVID-19 vaccination programme is guided by evidence. We will consider every possible intervention that supports the protection of children, the prevention of illness and disease in children, and safeguarding of their optimal development.

Updated: 21 May 2021

What is the College's view on the UK COVID-19 vaccination programme being extended to under-16s?

Clinical trials are under way to understand safety data and efficacy for vaccinating children under 16 years old. We would look to the [Joint Committee on Vaccinations and Immunisation \(https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/joint-committee-on-vaccination-and-immunisation) (JCVI) who are the expert body responsible for advising the UK Government's health departments on immunisation. The JCVI are responsible for reviewing evidence on the burden of disease, with information about safety and efficacy to make recommendations on impactful immunisation strategies and includes members with paediatric knowledge and expertise.

At present, **JCVI has advised** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-30-december-2020>) that only those at very high risk of exposure and serious outcomes should be offered this vaccine. According to the **Green Book** (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a>) vaccination may be considered for children with severe neuro-disabilities who tend to get recurrent respiratory tract infections and who frequently spend time in specialised residential care settings for children with complex needs. **Note:** this would be considered unlicensed use of the vaccine.

For these children, clinicians should discuss the benefits and risks with children, young people and parents/guardians, including the paucity of safety data for children under 16, before taking a decision on vaccination. We have produced **guidance** (<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/message-paediatricians-children-young-people-covid-19-vaccination-programme>) to support paediatricians to make informed choices around vaccinating these groups.

There are ethical questions that arise from considering the risks and benefits to children receiving the vaccination. The College is actively reflecting on these ethical questions which will be informed by the available evidence on safety and, for example, information about the extent of herd immunity.

Is the COVID-19 vaccine safe and effective for children and young people?

At the time of writing the answer to this question is unknown.

The JCVI is currently reviewing efficacy and safety data from the various vaccine trials in children and young people. As evidence becomes available it will be reviewed and advice offered as appropriate. The UK Government will then make a decision regarding the extension, or otherwise, of the vaccination programme to younger age groups.

Do children need to be vaccinated if almost all adults are vaccinated?

This is something that the JCVI and Government will be considering. They will be looking at transmission rates as well as evidence and expert opinion on, for example, the extent of herd immunity.

Are particular age groups or groups of patients more likely to benefit from the COVID-19 vaccine – or, conversely, to be at risk of side effects?

At the time of writing the answer to this question is unknown. The JCVI will look to evidence from clinical trials when considering where a vaccine can be most effective. They are responsible for identifying knowledge gaps relating to immunisation, or immunisation programmes where further research and/or surveillance should be considered.

Most children suffer from a **very minor illness with COVID-19 (/resources/covid-19-research-evidence-summaries)** and it is important that routine immunisation programmes are maintained so that children are protected from other vaccine-preventable diseases.

What does this mean for the paediatric workforce?

Frontline health and social care workers have been prioritised to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. Local implementation of the programme should seek to mitigate risks arising from health inequalities in relation to COVID-19, such as those relating to ethnicity. Any member with personal concerns or queries about accessing or receiving the COVID-19 vaccine should discuss this with their occupational health team, clinical lead or College Tutor in the first instance.

Guidance has been updated for all women of childbearing age

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-women-of-childbearing-age-currently-pregnant-planning-a-pregnancy-or-breastfeeding/covid-19-vaccination-a-guide-for-women-of-childbearing-age-pregnant-planning-a-pregnancy-or-breastfeeding>), including those who are pregnant or breastfeeding. For pregnant women, the COVID-19 vaccine should be offered at the same time as the rest of the population, based on their age and clinical risk group.

We recognise the devastating impacts the pandemic is having to many of our international members, and the role played by stark inequalities in the global distribution of vaccines. We offer **[solidarity \(https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/india-covid-19-rcpch-statement-solidarity\)](https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/india-covid-19-rcpch-statement-solidarity)** to our colleagues in India, and paediatricians throughout the world.

For further information see the **[RCPCH position statement on vaccinations \(/resources/vaccination-uk-position-statement\)](#)** (August 2020) and the below external links.

Latest updates to this page

- Updates in this version (21 May 2021) - Statement updated to address current frequently asked questions
- Update in version 29 March 2021 - Reflect V7 of Green Book chapter 14a
- Update in version 13 January 2021 - Addition of updated JCVI advice issued on 30 December 2020

External links

[Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency \(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/mhra-guidance-on-coronavirus-covid-19\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/mhra-guidance-on-coronavirus-covid-19)

[Statement from JCVI on immunisation prioritisation \(https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jcvi-statement-on-immunisation-prioritisation/statement-from-jcvi-on-immunisation-prioritisation\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jcvi-statement-on-immunisation-prioritisation/statement-from-jcvi-on-immunisation-prioritisation)

[England - NHS \(https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/\)](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/)

[Scotland- NHSInform \(https://www.nhsinform.scot/covid-19-vaccine/the-vaccines/the-vaccines-used-to-protect-against-coronavirus\)](https://www.nhsinform.scot/covid-19-vaccine/the-vaccines/the-vaccines-used-to-protect-against-coronavirus)

[Wales - Public Health Wales \(https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/immunisation-and-vaccines/covid-19-vaccination-information/\)](https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/immunisation-and-vaccines/covid-19-vaccination-information/)

[Northern Ireland - Public Health Agency \(https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/northern-](https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/covid-19-coronavirus/northern-)

[ireland-covid-19-vaccination-programme](#)

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[Message for paediatricians on children and young people and the COVID-19 vaccination programme \(/news-events/news/message-paediatricians-children-young-people-covid-19-vaccination-programme\)](#)

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