



## Coronavirus (COVID-19)

# Vaccination programme for children and young people

## Guidance for schools

**This guidance is for schools on the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination programme for 12 to 15 year olds. Please make sure this is available to all members of school teams who need to know about the programme.**

This autumn all children aged 12 to 15 years are being offered the [first dose of the COVID-19 vaccination](#). 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.

Vaccinating children should help to reduce the need for children to have time off school and to reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 within schools. The COVID-19 vaccination programme will therefore provide protection to children who are vaccinated and help to reduce disruption to face to face education this winter. It will also reduce the spread of COVID-19 outside the school - at home and in the wider community - so providing protection against those more vulnerable.



## Eligibility and timing of vaccination

All young people aged 16 and 17 years have been offered a first dose of vaccine. Children and young people aged **12 to 17 years who are at increased risk from infection**, or who are living with someone who is immunosuppressed, have been offered 2 doses of the vaccine, 8 weeks apart.

And now all children aged 12 to 15 years are being offered a first dose of vaccine as part of the COVID-19 vaccination programme. Children who are 12 years old and over on the day the school nursing team visits the school will be offered a vaccination.

## How vaccination in schools will work

Like all school-based vaccination programmes, the vaccines will be administered by healthcare staff working closely with the school and following the usual approach to school-based immunisation.

Your local Trust school nursing teams have been asked to work with schools to plan for the roll-out of COVID-19 vaccinations for 12 to 15 year olds. The Trusts will be the primary provider of the vaccination programme for healthy 12 to 15 year olds and will be legally responsible for the delivery of the vaccine.

The expectation is that the vaccination programme will be delivered primarily within schools but there might be certain areas or certain schools where this is not possible.

## How parent or guardian consent will be obtained

For those aged 12 to 15 years consent will be sought by the school nursing team from the parent or person with parental responsibility in the same way as for any other school vaccination programme.

A consent form and information leaflets (for children and for parents) will be used to seek parental consent. The information pack will be delivered to schools by a regional distribution company, which schools will then distribute to children as directed by their Trust school nursing team. Parents may also discuss further queries with a member of the Trust school nursing team or other health professional if required. Consent forms should then be returned to the school. The school should establish the number of children that have consented in preparation for

the day of the vaccine session.

The school can play an important role by:

- sharing the [leaflets and information](#)
- signposting parents and children to official sources of information on vaccines
- sending out email links, letters and reminders

## Benefits for schools

Vaccinating children should help to reduce the need for children to have time off school and should reduce the risk of spread of COVID-19 within schools. The main purpose of the COVID-19 post-primary schools vaccination programme is therefore to provide protection to the children who are vaccinated and to reduce the disruption to face to face education this winter.

Educational benefits may include:

- reducing the chance of outbreaks of COVID-19 in schools
- avoiding absenteeism due to COVID-19 infection and for isolation

## The role of schools

We are grateful for the support that schools provide by hosting Health and Social Care (HSC) vaccination sessions. Like all school-based vaccination programmes, the vaccines will be administered by healthcare staff with appropriate qualifications who work to nationally agreed standards. Vaccines are offered in schools to ensure easy access for all children.

The local school nursing team will be in contact with your school to agree a date for the vaccination session and the best approach for implementing the programme in your school.

Schools will have the following roles, which will be familiar from other vaccination programmes:

- to share the information leaflets and consent form to children and their parents when directed by their school nursing team
- to receive returned consent forms to give to the nursing team on the day they attend the school for the session
- to establish the number of children that have consented for the day of the vaccine session
- to provide the space within school to facilitate vaccination and allow a 15 minute waiting period afterward, and the time away from the timetable, to enable vaccinations to take place

Your local school nursing team will try and keep disruption to a minimum and will only ask you to do the things that they cannot do themselves.

You will be asked to:

- work with the school nursing team to agree the best approach for implementing the programme in your school
- nominate a named contact for the school nursing team to liaise with
- agree a date for the vaccination session
- work with the school nursing team to identify a suitable location for the session (for example, school hall) and for the 15 minute post-vaccination observation period to take place (this observation will be undertaken by qualified school nursing staff)
- agree a process for providing parents with the information leaflets and consent form
- encourage children and their parents to return the consent form by an agreed date
- send reminders through your usual channels such as email or text distribution lists, parent newsletters, visual display screens
- let parents know on which day vaccination will take place
- let the children know what will happen and when

## The COVID-19 vaccine

The vaccination 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. You cannot get COVID-19 from the vaccine.

## 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

Children and young people may also have flu-like symptoms with episodes of shivering and shaking for a day or 2.

We suggest that children 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 a very small number of cases of inflammation of the heart called myocarditis or pericarditis, reported very rarely after COVID-19 vaccines. Most of these cases recovered within a few days and felt better following rest and simple treatments.

The 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.

Urgent medical advice should be sought if a child has the following symptoms in the 7 days following vaccination:

- chest pain
- shortness of breath
- feelings of having a fast-beating, fluttering, or pounding heart

## Frequently asked questions

### Where can I find information on COVID-19 vaccination for children and adults?

The [Public Health Agency leaflets](#) provide more information for parents and children on the vaccine, including how it works and what to expect after COVID-19 vaccination.

Alternative formats and translations will also be available on the PHA website.

### When do the vaccinations need to be given?

The COVID-19 vaccinations are being given during the autumn term. Your local school nursing team will be in touch to arrange a date.

## Who will be giving the vaccine to the children?

The programme will be delivered by the Trust school nursing teams. The team will administer the vaccination according to nationally agreed standards. Staff are appropriately qualified, trained (including in safeguarding) and experienced in vaccinating children and young people. Staff administering the vaccine will be wearing appropriate personal protective equipment.

## How will the school nursing team identify the children to be vaccinated?

Individual packs containing information leaflets (for the young person and for the parent) and the consent form will be sent to the school for onward distribution to parents. Schools are asked to encourage children and their parents to return the consent form before the day the school nursing team visit the school.

The school should then be able to provide a list of the children that have consented for the vaccine on the day of the session.

## 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 post-primary schools, some older children may be sufficiently mature 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 on the day of the session. Every effort will be made to contact the parent to seek their verbal consent. The school has no role in this process. This is a well established process which is used in other school-based vaccination programmes.

## How are schools involved in the consent process?

Whilst schools may host immunisation services, they are not responsible for securing parental or child consent, for assessing Gillick competence or mediating between parents and children who may disagree about whether or not to consent.

This is the role of registered nurses in the school nursing team, who have extensive experience and the expertise to handle these issues and are professionally accountable for their decisions. Legal accountability for offering COVID-19 vaccines to children and young people sits with the school nursing team and not with the school.

## Can parents refuse to have their child vaccinated?

Yes. The vaccination is not mandatory. Parents will be asked to give their consent for the vaccination. Children 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 by the vaccination session.

## What happens if a parent has not consented, but the child 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 child wants to be vaccinated and is judged to be Gillick competent by the healthcare professional, the child can still be vaccinated. In this case, the healthcare professional will make every effort to contact a parent to check before they proceed.

If a parent objects to their child being vaccinated but the child wants to be vaccinated and is judged to be Gillick competent, the healthcare professional will try to reach agreement between the parent and child. However, the parent cannot overrule the decision of a Gillick competent child.

Trained professionals in the school nursing team, with expertise in vaccinating children will speak to the child.

The school nursing team will assess the individual child's capacity to self-consent (Gillick competence) and be responsible for deciding the appropriateness of administering the vaccine. If no consent is received, and the child is not Gillick competent or does not want to be vaccinated, the immunisation will not proceed. You can read about [Gillick competence](#) on page 3 of chapter 2 of the Green Book on immunisation. This is a well established process which is used in other school-based vaccination programmes.

## What should be done if parents refuse to send their child into school because of concerns about the vaccine?

Schools can reassure parents that if a child does not have parental consent and does not want to get the vaccine they will not receive it. This will follow usual practice, even if the child is attending school on the day of vaccination.

Schools should also remind parents that school attendance is mandatory for all pupils of compulsory school age and that being in school is the best thing for their mental and physical health and wellbeing. If parents have questions about whether to consent to their child getting the vaccine, schools should direct them to the Trust school nursing team or their GP.

## Does GDPR change how consent needs to be obtained?

All schools' immunisation services are compliant with the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). Schools should work with their school nursing team as usual, who will provide appropriate information resources and parental consent forms.

## How should schools respond to any disruptive activity in response to the vaccination programme?

The primary aims of the schools vaccination programme are to provide individual protection to children and to reduce disruption to education from COVID-19.

As the UK Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) consider education one of the most important drivers of improved public and mental health, reducing disruption to education will also reduce public and mental health harm.

We know that some schools are receiving campaign letters and emails with misinformation about the vaccine programme and would like advice on how to handle protests in the event they were to take place at school. While the majority of protests are peaceful, they can often be noisy, provocative and disruptive, and a small minority may become hostile. The risk caused by a protest should be assessed in consultation with the Trust school nursing team,

local PSNI and council. PSNI may have received prior notification of a protest although some may turn up unannounced. The Trust school nursing teams will also inform the local PSNI and relevant council of the timetable of school vaccine visits. This will allow local PSNI to prioritise their staff to your school if required.

Schools should already have a security policy, based on a security risk assessment. This process is covered in published guidance on school and college security. Schools should ensure these are up to date and include potential protests. These plans should be discussed with the Trust when agreeing their delivery plan.

In the event of a planned or unexpected protest or disruptive activity outside a school, you should alert the school nursing team and PSNI. In order to assess the best way to manage the situation, they will need information on the location, number of demonstrators and whether it is peaceful or disruptive. You should consider alternative entrances/exits to the building and avoid directly engaging with the protestors. You should also keep a record of threatening, abusive or insulting words or behaviour.

## How should schools respond to misinformation campaigns about the vaccine?

We are aware some schools have received letters or emails which feature false or misleading information (misinformation) about the safety, efficacy and purpose of the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Principals and teachers are advised:

1. Familiarise yourself with the information packs that have been shared for parents and young people.
2. Do not engage directly: misinformation narratives and tactics flourish when they are responded to.
3. Acknowledge receipt: if a response is needed, simply acknowledge receipt of concerns.
4. If there is a need to, refer to the latest scientific guidance on the issue. Some helpful links include trusted sources:

- [COVID-19 schools vaccination programme information leaflets](#) from Public Health Agency
- [Vaccine Knowledge](#) project
- The World Health Organization's [Mythbusters](#) page
- The [Check Before You Share Toolkit](#)
- For information on the COVID-19 vaccines visit: [coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/productinformation](https://coronavirus-yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/productinformation)
- For accurate and up to date information on COVID-19 vaccines, visit [NHS.UK](https://www.nhs.uk).

## What about those children turning 12 years of age within the school year, after the date of the vaccination session?

The school nursing team will vaccinate all children aged 12 years and over on the day of the school visit. Young people in Year 8 who are aged 12 years and have consented will be vaccinated at the same session, and 16 and 17 year olds who have not already received their first vaccine will be able to get it during the school vaccination session (see below).

Alternative arrangements will be made for any children who miss the first vaccination in their school, either through their own GP or by different Trust arrangements outside the school setting.. This will help to ensure that the following pupils can access the vaccine:

- those turning 12 years after the session
- those who were absent from school on the day
- those who have recently had a COVID-19 infection
- those who subsequently change their minds or take longer to reach a decision

## Will 16 and 17 year olds be vaccinated in schools?

16 and 17 year olds are already being offered a vaccination through the adult vaccination system. They can attend mobile COVID-19 vaccination clinics. See [www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine)

However, if a 16 or 17 year old is unable to receive the vaccine at a mobile clinic and requests it on the day of the school nursing visit, the nurses are likely to be able to facilitate the request if, in advance of the session, the school can provide an approximate number of pupils aged 16 and over who wish to receive their vaccination in school.

## What happens if a child is not present on the day when vaccination is offered in the school?

For any children absent on the vaccination day, there will be catch-up arrangements in place, either through their own GP or by different Trust arrangements outside the school setting.

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

If a child is unwell on the day, the school nursing team will decide whether to proceed with vaccination or not. All questions on the suitability of the vaccine for individual children should be directed to the school nursing team delivering the vaccinations. For any children who want to be vaccinated but are unable for health or other reasons to have the vaccine on the day, there will be catch-up arrangements in place either through their own GP or by different Trust arrangements outside the school setting.

## Why do children have to be observed for 15 minutes after vaccination?

Serious allergic reactions to vaccination are very rare but tend to happen within a few minutes of the injection. Trust 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.



## What should be done if a child becomes unwell in school after receiving the vaccination?

If the school nursing team is still on site, seek advice directly from them. If the school nursing team has left the site, manage the situation according to existing policies for pupil sickness in school. Contact the school nursing team to ensure they are aware and can report any event related to the timing of administration of the vaccine.

See [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/safety-and-side-effects](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/safety-and-side-effects) for further information.

## Will every school have vaccinations on site?

We expect most vaccinations for 12 to 15 year olds to happen at school during school hours although this might be different for a small number of schools.

In schools where facilities are not available on site, the local Trust will make arrangements to ensure that pupils can access vaccination in a convenient alternative location, as soon as possible.

## Will children who are home educated be offered a vaccine as part of this programme?

All children 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 Trust school nursing team will have plans in place to offer vaccination to these children.

## Will children in special schools 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 the National Booking Service to make an appointment for a COVID-19 vaccination?

Booking via the National Booking Service is not presently planned for children in this age group.

## Can school staff have the vaccine?

Not as part of the schools' programme. All school staff will already have been offered vaccination as part of the adult programme.

They should make sure that they have had their 2 doses of COVID-19 vaccine. If they have not yet been vaccinated, they can still attend one of the walk-in clinics or book with their community pharmacy.

See [nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine](http://nidirect.gov.uk/covid-vaccine)



# Operational timeline

## Before vaccination sessions begin

### First 3 weeks in October

- Public Health Agency (PHA) will share information with all schools via Education Authority, which will be added onto the C2K platform.
- Your local Health and Social Care (HSC) Trust school nursing team will be responsible for the planning and arrangements of the vaccine session in your school. A member of the school nursing team will contact schools to begin partnership planning of a tailored delivery plan.
- Schools should identify key staff to assist with the delivery.
- Points to consider when establishing your delivery plan:
  - » Sharing the information pack with children and their parents
  - » Receiving returned consent forms
  - » Establishing the number of consented children for the day of session
  - » Considering the location where vaccination will take place (school nurses will advise on size etc.)
  - » Accommodating children to wait 15 minutes following vaccination
  - » Ensuring availability of school staff to assist school nurses in keeping disruption to a minimum
  - » Sending reminders through usual channels such as email or text distribution lists, parent newsletters, website, visual display screens.
- PHA children/parent information pack will be delivered to schools by a central distribution company (information leaflets for child, parent and consent form and letter). Estimated third week in October.
- A member of the school nursing team will contact schools again to confirm the date of the vaccination programme (this may be after the information packs have arrived at the school). This may be the same date as when they attend for flu vaccination. There is limited flexibility for Trusts, so we encourage you to accommodate this date.
- School nurse team will provide instruction on sending the information pack home with children. Schools should distribute the information packs to parents for return by the day of the session.
- Schools should familiarise themselves with the information pack (available on [www.pha.site/covid-vaccine-schools](http://www.pha.site/covid-vaccine-schools)) and consent form in order to identify suspicious looking materials. See page 5 for more information.
- The Trust school nursing teams will inform local PSNI, council and ambulance service of the schedule of all school sessions in their areas. This will allow these services to prioritise resources on the day of the session, **if** required.
- **Schools should notify their Trust school nursing team and the PHA if they receive suspicious anti-vaxx materials or information about potential planned protests.**



## Vaccination sessions start to roll out

### From end October

- Trusts are planning to start the programme in post-primary schools in late October. The programme is planned to be completed by December.
- Trusts will start the programme in Special Schools in early to mid-October.

## During vaccination sessions

### End of October to December

- School nurses will attend school as per their agreed plan. The school nurse team will only attend the school on one occasion.
- Schools should facilitate early entry of the nursing team to the school grounds to enable them to set up.
- If there are protestors, the school and Trust should follow advice on protest management as detailed on page 5 of this document.
- School staff will be encouraged to support logistics of the session to limit disruption in school.
- Nursing staff will administer the vaccine in line with standard COVID infection control procedures.
- Children will be required to wait for 15 minutes after receiving the vaccination and will be monitored by trained health professionals.
- Trust staff will record details of the children who are vaccinated; there will be no requirement for the school to keep any records.
- Mop-up opportunities for children who are unable to attend for vaccine at the school will be arranged outside the school setting.

## After vaccination sessions

- If child gets ill following a vaccine, please follow the guidance on page 7 of this document.
- Mop-up opportunities for children who are unable to attend for vaccine at the school will be arranged outside the school setting.
- Children who have an underlying health condition or who live with someone with a severely weakened immune system require two doses of vaccine 8 weeks apart. A second dose for those that need it will be arranged by the child's own GP.

## Further questions

- Schools that have questions on the operational delivery of the vaccine session should be addressed by your Trusts school nursing team.
- Parents who have questions about the vaccines should be directed to the information pack or the PHA website [www.pha.site/covid-vaccine-schools](http://www.pha.site/covid-vaccine-schools) in the first instance, followed by:
  - » Trust school nursing team
  - » Their local GP
- Schools should report potentially suspicious materials or information on protests to:
  - » Trust school nursing team
  - » Public Health Agency – [pha.immunisation@hscni.net](mailto:pha.immunisation@hscni.net)
  - » EA
- Schools that have other questions should speak to the Education Authority.

## Useful links

### COVID-19 vaccination on NHS.UK

[www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination)

### COVID-19 Green Book chapter 14a

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a)

### Consent Green Book chapter 2

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2)

### Schools vaccination programme for children aged 12-15

[www.pha.site/COVID-vaccine-schools](http://www.pha.site/COVID-vaccine-schools)

### [www.pha.site/COVID-vaccine-schools](http://www.pha.site/COVID-vaccine-schools) Easy-read adult COVID-19 vaccination leaflets

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-easy-read-resources](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-easy-read-resources)

### Patient Information Leaflet for Pfizer/BioNTech Comirnaty vaccine

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

### Current COVID-19 guidance

[www.nidirect.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/coronavirus)

### JCVI statement on COVID-19 vaccination of children aged 12 to 15 years

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/jcvi-statement-september-2021-covid-19-vaccination-of-children-aged-12-to-15-years/jcvi-statement-on-covid-19-vaccination-of-children-aged-12-to-15-years-3-september-2021#introduction](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jcvi-statement-september-2021-covid-19-vaccination-of-children-aged-12-to-15-years/jcvi-statement-on-covid-19-vaccination-of-children-aged-12-to-15-years-3-september-2021#introduction)

### UK CMOs letter

[www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-uk-cmo-letter-130921-revised.pdf](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/health/doh-uk-cmo-letter-130921-revised.pdf)

### Impact on school absence from COVID-19 vaccination of healthy 12 to 15 year old children

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/impact-on-school-absence-from-covid-19-vaccination-of-healthy-12-to-15-year-old-children/impact-on-school-absence-from-covid-19-vaccination-of-healthy-12-to-15-year-old-children](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/impact-on-school-absence-from-covid-19-vaccination-of-healthy-12-to-15-year-old-children/impact-on-school-absence-from-covid-19-vaccination-of-healthy-12-to-15-year-old-children)



**Public Health Agency**  
12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.  
Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).  
[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

Find us on:



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