

COVID-19 vaccination programme for young people.

This autumn all young people aged 12 to 15 years are being offered the first dose of the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine.

Who can have the vaccination and when?

- 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 the student is 12 years old or more on the day the vaccinations are taking place in school, they will be offered the vaccine.

If the student does not get the vaccine on the day, it is offered in the school

- For any student 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 age immunisation service provider will be able to share with the school.
- This includes any student who turns 12 years of age after the day the school age immunisation service provider visits the school.

If the student has a health condition or is unwell on the day of the vaccine session

If a student is unwell on the day, the school age immunisation service provider 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 the following pupils can access the vaccine:

- if the student turns 12 years of age after the session
- if the student is absent from school on the day
- If the student has recently had a COVID-19 infection
- if the parent / carer changes their mind about whether to have the vaccine or need a bit longer to reach a decision.

Consent

How the consent process works

- 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 on the day of the session. Every effort will be made to contact the parent to seek their verbal consent.
- 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 school's immunisation 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.
- [The Green Book of Immunisation](#) contains more information on consent including Gillick competence.

Common Questions

The student has allergies can they have the vaccination?

- There are very few children who cannot receive the vaccine.
- Prior to vaccination all individuals are issued with a leaflet that outlines safety information about the vaccine. This will include a link to more detailed information about any health conditions that may prevent a young person from receiving vaccination. You can read the [Information for UK recipients](#) for more information.
- All young people and their parents or carers should consult their clinician if they have concerns regarding allergies and COVID-19 vaccination.

Does the 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 effect 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](#).

Does the vaccine contain alcohol?

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

Does the vaccine 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](#) from DHSC provides more information.

Is the vaccine suitable for young people who are vegan or 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 with further information.

Does the vaccine contain COVID-19?

No, the vaccines do not contain any live virus.

The role of schools

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.

Schools will have 3 primary roles which will be familiar to them from other vaccination programmes:

- to provide information to their School Age Immunisation Service (SAIS) provider on which children on their roll are eligible for the vaccine
- to share the information leaflet, consent form and invitation letter supplied by the SAIS team with parents and children
- to provide the space within school, and the time away from the timetable, to enable vaccinations to take place

As well as:

- 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

How will the SAIS provider team identify the children to be vaccinated?

- The team will then have a list of all children for whom consent has been received in advance of the immunisation 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.

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 to consent.
- This is the role of registered nurses in the SAIS, 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 SAIS 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 SAIS team, with expertise in vaccinating children will speak to the child. The SAIS team will assess the individual child's capacity to self-consent (Gillick competence) and be responsible for deciding the appropriateness of administering the vaccine.

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 can direct them to the local SAIS provider. Parents will be provided with contact details for the SAIS provider with the consent form.

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

- The primary aims of the school's 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.
- 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.
- The SAIS team will have advice from the NHS COVID-19 Vaccine Deployment Programme about running this programme securely. Schools are advised to get in touch with the SAIS team at the first opportunity to understand what security planning they have in place, and what if any actions they recommend you carry out ahead of vaccinations in your school.
- In the event of a protest or disruptive activity outside a school, or if schools know a protest is planned, they should alert the SAIS provider, Local Authority, and police contacts to discuss the best way to manage the situation.

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.

Headteachers and teachers are advised:

- Not to engage directly: misinformation narratives and tactics flourish when they are responded to.
- Acknowledge receipt: if a response is needed, simply acknowledge receipt of concerns.
- If there is a need to, refer to the latest scientific guidance on the issue. Some helpful links to trusted sources include:

[COVID-19 children's programme guidance](#) and leaflets from Public Health England

[Vaccine Knowledge project](#)

The World Health Organization's [Mythbusters page](#)

The [Check Before You Share Toolkit](#)

[Health Publications website](#) to order and download COVID-19 publications

information on the [COVID-19 vaccines](#)

information on the [COVID-19 vaccination programme](#)

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. SAIS teams are all trained to spot and manage allergic reactions and so all children will be observed for 15 minutes.
- All SAIS providers 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 SAIS provider team is still on site, seek advice directly from them. If the SAIS provider team has left the site, manage the situation according to existing policies for pupil sickness in school. Contact the SAIS provider team to ensure they are aware and can report any event related to the timing of administration of the vaccine.
- See [NHS.UK](#) for further information.