

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Health

UPDATE ON COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME

Published on Tuesday 14 September 2021.

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): As Members will be aware yesterday the Chief Medical Officers provided their advice that the offer of universal vaccination should be extended to all children and young people aged 12 to 15 not already covered by existing JCVI advice.

I have now carefully considered the advice and, along with the Health Ministers across the rest of the United Kingdom, have accepted their recommendation to expand the vaccination programme to all those aged 12-15. This move will help protect young people from catching COVID-19 and is expected to prevent disruption in schools by reducing transmission.

All those aged 12 to 15 in Northern Ireland will now be offered one dose of the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and parental consent will be sought prior to vaccination. For those who are part of an 'at risk' group, they will receive two doses, eight weeks apart, in line with JCVI advice.

The HSC is preparing to deliver the programme which is expected to be a schools-based vaccination programme, which is the successful model used for vaccinations including for HPV and the annual flu programme. They will be supported by GPs where necessary. Consent forms for vaccination will begin to be distributed via schools shortly.

Most school-aged children aged 12 to 15 are expected to primarily receive their COVID-19 vaccination in their school with alternative provision for those who are home schooled or in secure services.

In addition to the 12-15 programme, the JCVI have also been considering the options for and timing of a booster programme to revaccinate adults in order to reduce mortality, morbidity and hospitalisations from COVID-19 over the 2021/22 winter period and through 2022, as well as to minimise the COVID-19 case infection rate and the chance of new variants emerging.

That advice has now been received and JCVI advises that for the 2021 COVID-19 booster vaccine programme individuals who received vaccination in Phase 1 of the COVID-19 vaccination programme (priority groups 1-9) should be offered a third dose of a COVID-19 vaccine as a booster dose. This includes:

- Those living in residential care homes for older adults;
- All adults aged 50 years or over;
- Frontline health and social care workers;
- All those aged 16 to 49 years with underlying health conditions that put them at higher risk of severe COVID-19 (as set out in the Green Book), and adult carers; and
- Adult household contacts of immunosuppressed individuals.

JCVI advises that the booster vaccine dose is offered no earlier than six months after completion of the primary vaccine course, and that the booster programme should be deployed in the same order as during Phase 1, with operational flexibility exercised where appropriate to maximise delivery.

Again, I can confirm to Members that I have accepted the advice of the JCVI and plans for rollout are ready for implementation. This will begin with Trust mobile teams visiting all residential care homes to vaccinate residents and staff. In addition Trusts will begin to vaccinate their frontline health and social care staff. By early October we expect to see GPs starting to invite their oldest patients in to receive

their booster dose as they pass the six month mark from receiving their second dose, while community pharmacies will offer vaccination to non-Trust employed frontline staff such as domiciliary care workers for instance.

These are two important developments with our vaccination programme and I will endeavour to continue keep the House and members of the public informed in the days and weeks ahead.