



E: [vaccinationsdelivery@gov.scot](mailto:vaccinationsdelivery@gov.scot)

Dear Colleagues

**COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME:  
Universal vaccination of children and young people aged  
12-15 years against COVID-19**

Thank you for your outstanding commitment to helping deliver the COVID-19 vaccination programme. The pandemic is undoubtedly the biggest public health crisis in a generation, and certainly in our professional lifetimes.

Scotland's vaccination programme has been one of the fastest in the world with 91% of those over 18 years having received their first vaccination dose and 84% their second dose. Vaccination, along with testing, remains our best route out of the pandemic and it is crucial that people continue to come forward. Your continued efforts to support people when they arrive for vaccination has helped to ensure that public confidence in the programme remains high.

On 3 September 2021, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) announced that it did not recommend universal COVID-19 vaccination for 12 to 15 year olds without underlying health conditions at this time. The JCVI stated that although the health benefits from COVID-19 vaccinations are marginally greater than the potential known harms, the margin of benefit is too small to recommend vaccination for this age group currently. However, as there are considerations which go beyond its remit, the JCVI suggested that the Government may wish to seek further advice on the wider societal and educational impacts from the Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) of the UK, with representation from the JCVI in these discussions.

As with all decisions during this pandemic, the balance of risk and benefit has been carefully considered. The view of the UK CMOs is that the additional likely benefits of reducing educational disruption, and the consequent reduction in public health harm from educational disruption, on balance provide sufficient extra advantage

**From the Chief Medical Officer  
Deputy Chief Nursing Officer  
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer**

Dr Gregor Smith  
Anne Armstrong  
Professor Alison Strath

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**Addresses**

For action

Immunisation Co-ordinators  
Health Board Planning  
Operational Leads

For information

Chief Executives, NHS Boards Medical Directors, NHS Boards Primary Care Leads, NHS Boards Directors of Nursing & Midwifery, NHS Boards Chief Officers of Integration Authorities Chief Executives, Local Authorities Directors of Pharmacy Directors of Public Health General Practitioners Practice Nurses Chairs, NHS Boards Infectious Disease Consultants Consultant Physicians Chief Executive, Public Health Scotland NHS 24

**Further Enquiries**

Policy Issues

COVID Vaccination Policy  
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Medical Issues

Dr Syed Ahmed  
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Pharmaceutical and Vaccine Supply Issues

NHS NSS National Procurement:  
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in addition to the marginal advantage at an individual level identified by the JCVI to recommend in favour of vaccinating this group. They therefore recommended on public health grounds that Ministers extend the offer of universal vaccination with a first dose of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to all children and young people aged 12-15 years not already covered by the existing JCVI advice.

In formulating this view, the CMOs have been informed by the independent expertise of leaders from the clinical and public health professions across the UK. In addition, they have examined data from the Office for National Statistics as well as published data on the impact of COVID-19 on education, and other relevant published sources and have also benefited from having data available from the USA, Canada and Israel, which have already offered vaccines universally to children and young people aged 12-15 years.

The UK CMOs judge that it is likely vaccination will help reduce transmission of COVID-19 in schools which are attended by children and young people aged 12-15 years. COVID-19 is a disease which can be very effectively transmitted by mass spreading events, especially with Delta variant. Therefore, having a significant proportion of pupils vaccinated is likely to reduce the probability of such events which are likely to cause local outbreaks in, or associated with, schools. They will also reduce the chance that an individual child gets COVID-19. This means vaccination is likely to reduce (but not eliminate) disruption to education.

We recognise that the overwhelming benefits of vaccination for adults, where risk-benefit is very strongly in favour of vaccination for almost all groups, are not as clear-cut for children and young people aged 12-15 years. Children, young people and their parents will therefore need to understand potential benefits, potential side effects and the balance between them and you will have an important role supporting this.

In all instances, the offer of vaccination to children and young people must be accompanied by appropriate information to enable them, and those with parental responsibility, to be adequately appraised of the potential harms and benefits of vaccination as part of the informed consent process prior to vaccination. In Scotland, the legal age of capacity is 16 years. However, children under the age of 16 can consent to medical treatment if they understand what is being proposed - a clinician can determine whether the child has reached sufficient maturity to understand the nature and possible consequences of the procedure or treatment.

We already have a suite of resources relating to COVID-19 vaccines available that enable young people and those with parental responsibility to give informed consent and dedicated leaflets and easy-read versions of these resources are being developed. The workforce education resources are currently being revised/developed to reflect this latest information and will be available on the NHS Education TURASLearn page <https://learn.nes.nhs.scot/37676/immunisation/covid-19-vaccination-programme>. It is essential that children and young people aged 12-15 years and their parents are supported in their decisions, whatever decisions they take, and are not stigmatised either for accepting, or not accepting, the vaccination offer. Individual choice should be respected.

Health Boards are considering utilising a range of staff and delivery settings – such as within schools, in the community, pre-arranged appointments and drop-in clinics to reach as many children as possible.

We hope you find this additional context helpful, especially in assisting with ensuring informed consent. Please share this letter with your vaccination teams.

Thank you for your continued support in delivering the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

Yours sincerely

*Dr Gregor Smith*

**Chief Medical Officer**

*Anne Armstrong*

**Deputy Chief Nursing  
Officer**

*Professor Alison Strath*

**Chief Pharmaceutical  
Officer**