

22nd September 2021

Dear Parents and Carers

COVID-19 vaccination programme for children and young people

The Department for Education has now issued guidance in response to the decision of the Chief Medical Officer to extend the vaccination programme to 12 to 15-year-olds. The purpose of this letter is to provide you with a summary of the programme and how it will be run.

Who will run the programme?

Like all school-based vaccination programmes, the School Age Immunisation Service (SAIS) will plan the roll-out and administer the jabs.

Where does legal accountability sit for this programme?

Legal accountability for offering COVID-19 vaccines to children and young people sits with the SAIS and not with the school.

What are the benefits and possible side effects of having the vaccine?

The Chief Medical Officer has advised that 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 in secondary schools will therefore provide protection to children who are vaccinated and help to reduce disruption to face to face education this winter.

The leaflet that will accompany the invitation to receive the vaccine will explain the benefits and potential side effects of the vaccine. There is also some information in the full guidance (see link at the bottom of this letter).

What role will schools play?

Schools will have three primary roles – similar to other vaccination programmes:

- to provide information to their 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.

Is the vaccination mandatory (compulsory) and if not, how will consent be obtained?

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

Consent will be sought by the vaccination team, and parents will be provided a contact number for the SAIS in case of any queries. All parents are asked for consent and will usually make the decision jointly with their children.

In secondary schools, some older children may be “sufficiently mature to provide their own consent” (this is known as “Gillick Competence” and will be assessed by the vaccine team). In such a case, “every effort will be made to contact the parent to seek their verbal consent.” The guidance states that schools have “no role in this process”. They are also not responsible for “mediating between parents and children who may disagree about whether or not 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.” A parent cannot overrule the decision of a Gillick Competent child.

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.

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

SAIS providers will vaccinate all children aged 12 years and over on the day of the school visit. A follow-up offer will be made to any children who miss the first vaccination in their school.

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. Some SAIS providers may have the capacity to offer the vaccination to 16 and 17-year-olds in school who have not yet taken up their first dose.

The guidance for schools is available in full [here](#).

An information leaflet for children and young people is available [here](#).

I hope that this provides you with some clarity and reassurance about the school-based vaccination programme. Your child’s school will write to you again with further details as soon as they receive them.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A Arlidge". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Andrea Arlidge
Chief Executive