

Friday, 19 November 2021

COVID-19 vaccines to be administered in secondary schools and colleges

The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme will be offered in secondary schools and colleges, for eligible students, aged 12 and over, from Monday, 29 November.

The recommendation to administer the vaccination programme in secondary schools and colleges, from Competent Authority Ministers, follows advice from Public Health in consultation with the Scientific and Technical Advisory Cell (STAC).

The vaccination programme will begin on Monday, 29 November and parents and carers of eligible students will receive information through their child's school or college from today (Friday, 19 November).

Parents of students aged between 12 and 15 must return a consent form to school by Friday 26 November. Students aged 16 and over can complete the form for themselves.

If young people would prefer to attend their COVID-19 vaccination alongside their parent or carer, appointments will remain available at Fort Regent outside of school hours. This includes walk in appointments for first doses, and parents or carers do not need to book an appointment in advance.

Following this week's recommendation by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), 16 and 17-year-olds will soon be eligible to receive a second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine. Second doses will be administered at Fort Regent by booked appointment only. More details on when second doses will be rolled out will be available soon.

COVID-19 vaccines for young people have been approved by regulatory bodies around the world including the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Authority (MHRA), the European Medicines Agency (EMA) and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and have been rolled out in the United States, Canada and countries throughout Europe for many months.

All four UK Chief Medical Officers (CMO) agreed that vaccination should be recommended to young people aged 12 and over based on evidence from child health, mental health, general practice and public health used in addition to the clinical focus of JCVI.

Deputy Medical Officer of Health, Dr Ivan Muscat, said: "Vaccination brings great benefits by reducing your chances of catching COVID-19 and preventing illness. A single dose of vaccine in children reduces the infection rate by 50%, and symptomatic infection by two thirds compared to unvaccinated children. I am aware there are sometimes concerns when it comes to vaccinating children, but I would like to reassure parents that these vaccines are safe for young people. This reassurance is based on all the experience that has now been gleaned from the millions of doses of vaccine given to children worldwide.

"By getting your child vaccinated, you are giving them a good defense against COVID-19 – particularly as we see cases increasing within education settings. It is important that children are protected, not only for their health, but also so that they can stay in school with their friends rather than learning remotely from home. I urge those who have not yet had their first vaccine to take this opportunity to get vaccinated at school."

Minister for Health and Social Services, Deputy Richard Renouf, said: "As at Sunday 14 November, 37% of 12 to 17 year olds in Jersey had received one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. I am pleased that these Islanders have come forward to have their vaccine and I urge them to encourage their friends and family to do the same.

"By administering the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine in schools for those who consent to getting it, the disruptions currently faced in schools should decrease which means students stay in school with their friends – this is so important not only for their education, but also for their mental health and wellbeing."

Education and Children's Minister Deputy Scott Wickenden said: "I would like to offer my thanks to secondary schools and students who have shared their feedback to help with the launch of the vaccination programme in schools.

"We have listened to the feedback from young people who asked, during our Ask the Expert event to have more information on the COVID vaccine in a youth-friendly format and to make it easily accessible for them.

"By administering COVID-19 vaccines in schools, the way we did with the nasal flu vaccination and other vaccination programmes, it will be easier for young people who wish to get vaccinated against COVID-19 to access the vaccine, without having to go to Fort Regent."

Children's Commissioner Deborah McMillan, who has been meeting with UK Children's Commissioners, said: "In a recent meeting with the other UK Children's Commissioners, I had the opportunity to discuss some of the key factors that have featured in Jersey's

decision to offer vaccinations to this particular age group. I also heard from my colleagues elsewhere in the UK about the varying levels of uptake, and the differing reactions of communities, in their jurisdictions when considering this issue.

“We were all unanimous in identifying informed consent and a child’s right to privacy as the central considerations. I have already said this publicly, and have also said it a number of times to Government in the form of formal advice on the matter, but it bears repeating now: the decision on whether or not to take up the offer of a vaccination should be an informed one, made by the child in question, and should be based on the best interests of that child.

“Child-friendly information is at the heart of this, as is the ability to be able to ask questions in full confidence, and to make individual arrangements or to choose whether or not to have the vaccination without attracting any stigma or undue attention.”

Parents are required to provide consent if their child is between the age of 12 and 15. They will have received a copy of the consent form, which needs to be handed to their child’s school by Friday 26 November. Alternatively, parents can complete a consent form digitally which is accessible at gov.je/vax