**COVID-19 vaccination programme response to omicron coronavirus variant: change to minimum booster interval and inclusion of cohorts 11 and 12 (18-39 years) in the booster programme**

On 29 November the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) published advice on the UK vaccine response to the B.1.1.529 (Omicron) variant. The advice is available [here](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-vaccine-response-to-the-omicron-variant-jcvi-advice/jcvi-advice-on-the-uk-vaccine-response-to-the-omicron-variant) and a copy of the system letter setting out next steps is available [here.](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/jcvi-advice-in-response-to-the-emergence-of-the-b-1-1-529-omicron-variant-next-steps-for-deployment/)

This note should be read in conjunction with the system letter.

**KEY DATES**

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| --- | --- |
| **29 November** | [JCVI advice on the UK vaccine response to the Omicron variant](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-vaccine-response-to-the-omicron-variant-jcvi-advice/jcvi-advice-on-the-uk-vaccine-response-to-the-omicron-variant) |
| **30 November** | Update to the [Green Book Chapter 14a](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1033391/Greenbook_chapter_14a_15Nov21.pdf) |
| **w/c 29 November and w/c 6 December** | All vaccination sites to review and increase capacity via NBS calendars and walk-in clinics |
| **w/c 6 December** | Phase 3 [Local Enhanced Service Specification](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/community-pharmacy-local-enhanced-service-specification-phase-3-coronavirus-vaccination/) for CP and [Enhanced Service specification](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/enhanced-service-specification-phase-3-coronavirus-vaccination/) for GPs published |
| **8 December** | GP IT Vaccine Dashboard updated to reflect the three-months (91 days) interval to support PCNs using Local Booking Solutions |
| **3pm, 10 December** | Deadline for practices (not delivering the phase 3 enhanced service) to notify commissioner if they wish to opt-in |
| **3pm, 13 December** | Regional confirmation of new PCN Groupings that wish to be onboarded in December/January. |
| **by 13 December** | Patient Group Directions and National Protocols updated (latest) |
| **By 13 December** | NBS appointments for cohorts 1-10 at three months (91 days) from final primary course dose to booster vaccine (latest). The national walk-in site finder at [www.nhs.uk/grab-a-jab](http://www.nhs.uk/grab-a-jab) will be updated. The NBS opening and PGD publication will be aligned. |

**Prioritisation**

* All vaccination teams should continue to focus on vaccinating those at highest risk from COVID-19 and in particular residents and staff in care homes, the housebound and people who are severely immunosuppressed.

**Patient Group Directions (PGDs) and National Protocols**

* The PGDs and National Protocols for Moderna (Spikevax®) and Pfizer/BioNTech (Comirnaty®) will be updated by 13 December. Both vaccines should be used with equal preference in the COVID-19 booster programme.
* Where there is a prescriber on site boosters may be administered under PSD arrangement to eligible patients in cohorts 1-10 and severely immunosuppressed individuals (Booster/4th dose). All staff should be briefed on eligibility for all severely immunosuppressed patients.

**Supply**

* Any site requiring uplifts of vaccine supply should request through the Supply Planner following usual processes. If urgent, sites should raise this with their SVOC in the first instance.

**Booking capacity**

* All sites on NBS now need to load their calendars to the end of January as a minimum. Providers using local booking systems should do the same. Walk-in clinics must have processes in place to identify eligible cohorts (C1-10) only.
* **Sites must not open any local booking systems or walk-in appointments to cohorts 11 and 12 or second doses for healthy 12-15 year-olds until notified by the Commissioner.**

**Workforce**

* Details of workforce support is at <https://future.nhs.uk/CovidVaccinations/grouphome>

**Point of Care Systems**

* Point of Care (POC) Systems will be updated to reflect the new dosing interval. Until then the warning message will continue to be displayed. For individuals who present for a booster as their fourth dose, sites are advised to record this as a subsequent booster within the PoC Systems.
* For PCNs and CPs, the existing supplementary payment field will be updated to include vaccinations administered to the severely immunosuppressed and support the new financial incentive supplement of £10 (see below). This will be introduced imminently but should not prevent any site from recording the vaccination event from the 1 December 2021 and claiming the additional payment.

**Movement of vaccine to individual practices (FOR PCNS ONLY)**

* We previously set out in the COVID-19 Enhanced Service Vaccination [Collaboration Agreement](https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/covid-19-vaccination-programme-2020-21-covid-19-enhanced-service-vaccination-collaboration-agreement/) that the GP practices in the PCN Grouping shall administer the majority of COVID-19 vaccinations from a PCN Grouping's Designated Site and outlined the limited circumstances in which the COVID-19 vaccine could be moved to another location (that is, to a care home or “pop up”, or to the practice premises of one of the practices in the PCN Grouping where there is a specific reason for the vaccine to be given at that location, which may include, but is not limited to, patients being unable to travel to the Designated Site; the population being accessed would otherwise be defined as hard to reach; or to reduce health inequalities).
* Considering the need to rapidly expand capacity across the delivery network, the MHRA has expanded the circumstances in which the COVID-19 vaccine may be moved from a PCN Grouping’s designated site(s) to another location.
* GP practices within a PCN Grouping may move COVID-19 vaccine from their Designated Site to collaborating individual GP practices within the PCN Grouping to increase the possibility of opportunistic administration of the vaccination to increase take up of the vaccine. Movement continues to be subject to:
  + all requirements and guidance on the movement, storage and handling of COVID-19 vaccines being adhered to;
  + there being no onward movement of the vaccine. For example, it is not permitted for a PCN to transport the COVID-19 vaccine from the PCN Grouping’s designated site(s) to a collaborating individual GP practice and then onto a pop-up site or care home etc; and
  + the arrangements being reflected in the PCN Grouping’s Collaboration Agreement;
* No COVID-19 vaccine can be moved to GP practices (or other providers) not signed up to the Phase 3 Enhanced Service specification and the PCN Grouping’s Collaboration Agreement. It is still expected that capacity is maintained at the PCN Grouping’s designated site(s) but we hope this will help you deliver more opportunistic vaccinations.
* The template [Collaboration Agreement](https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/covid-19-vaccination-programme-2020-21-covid-19-enhanced-service-vaccination-collaboration-agreement/) will be updated shortly to reflect this.
* **Please note Community Pharmacy and Vaccination Centre sites are not part of a COVID-19 Vaccination Collaboration Agreement, and so can only move vaccine using the processes outlined in the** [**Mutual Aid Policy**](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/mutual-aid-and-the-transfer-of-covid-19-vaccines-between-hospital-hubs-vaccination-centres-and-local-vaccination-services/)**.**

**Primary Care Networks**

* No changes to the GP Enhanced Service specification are required but it will be updated shortly to incorporate the following financial supplements:
  + an increase to the Item of Service (IoS) fee to £15 per jab administered on weekdays and Saturdays from 1 December 2021 to 31 January 2022 (exclusive of days designated as a Bank Holiday) and an increase to the IoS fee to £20 per jab administered on Sundays or Bank Holidays over the same period
  + an increase in the supplement for third dose and booster vaccination of housebound patients to £30 from £20 until 31 December, backdated for those already carried out
  + a temporary supplement of £10 for the administration of COVID-19 vaccinations to severely immunosuppressed people from 1 December 2021 to 31 January 2022. From 1 December, LVS sites are advised to select the ‘other residential settings’ field within the Point of Care systems to ensure an additional supplementary payment of £10 can be applied to the Item of Service fee for any doses administered to patients identified as severely immunosuppressed. Point of Care system suppliers have been requested to amend the text within their system to reflect this change and this will be introduced imminently but should not prevent any site from recording this information and claiming the additional payment. Please note this payment will not apply to any vaccinations administered prior to 1 December 2021
  + an enhanced payment to support Clinical Director and management leadership of PCN sites to 1 WTE for the period 1 December 2021 to the end of March 2022.
* PCN Groupings can still opt in to deliver boosters to Cohort 10 (and 11 and 12 when announced) if they have sufficient capacity to do so; and should inform their commissioner if they wish to opt in.
* Practices wishing to opt-in to Phase 3 Enhanced Service to deliver in early January as part of a PCN need to notify their local commissioner by 3pm on 10 December. Regions are asked to notify the national team by **3pm on 13 December**, subject to appropriate checks being undertaken, to enable designation and onboarding to happen in the new year.
* Practices already delivering the phase 3 enhanced service are eligible for the support outlined in the system letter in relation to IIF subject to continuation in the programme until 31 March 2022. Given the opt in deadline of **10 December 2021**, practices not signed up to the phase 3 enhanced service need to opt in by 10 December 2021, be assured to go live in early January, and continue to participate in the enhanced service until 31 March 2022 to be eligible for this financial support.
* In exceptional circumstances a practice can change their PCN where this will enable the practice to remain in the programme and continue to deliver COVID-19 vaccinations until 7 January. Regional colleagues should submit a request via the established change control process.
* If a PCN is struggling with capacity, please talk to your local commissioner in the first instance about options, flexibilities and additional support.

**Community Pharmacy (CP) contractors**

* No change to the LES is required but it will be updated to reflect the financial incentives outlined above.
  + an increase to the IoS fee to £15 per jab administered on weekdays and Saturdays from 1 December 2021 to 31 January 2022 and an increase to the IoS to £20 per jab administered on Sundays or Bank Holidays over the same period
  + an increase in the supplement for third dose and booster vaccination of housebound patients to £30 from £20 until 31 December, backdated for those already carried out
  + a temporary supplement of £10 for the administration of COVID-19 vaccinations to severely immunosuppressed people from 1 December 2021 to 31 January 2022. From 1 December, LVS sites are advised to select the ‘other residential settings’ field within the Point of Care systems to ensure an additional supplementary payment of £10 can be applied to the Item of Service fee for any doses administered to patients identified as severely immunosuppressed. Point of Care system suppliers have been requested to amend the text within their 5 system to reflect this change and this will be introduced imminently but should not prevent any site from recording this information and claiming the additional payment. Please note this payment will not apply to any vaccinations administered prior to 1 December 2021.
* Further pharmacy sites are being added to the programme. Regional Teams are reviewing Expressions of Interest submitted in July 2021 and will contact Pharmacy Contractors where there is now a population need for commissioning. Additional targeted Expressions of Interest are being sought through the Site Designation Process outline in July. These are updated each Monday and can be found at <https://cv19pharmacyeoi.necsu.nhs.uk/>. Pharmacy contractors should liaise with their Regional Commissioners for more information.
* CCG Pharmacy Leads are required to support and assure vaccination sites as a priority and in line with the principles set out in our letters [here](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/12/C0945-Governance-handling-and-preparation-of-vaccines-by-GP-led-local-vaccination-centres-PCN-designated-sites.pdf) and [here](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/12/C0987-letter-to-community-pharmacy-sites-preparing-to-deliver-covid-19-vaccine.pdf) to Pharmacy leads.

**(Mass) Vaccination Centres**

* No change to the Vaccination Centre Service Specification is required to implement the JCVI guidance published on 29 November 2021. Vaccination Centres are reminded that PGD and/or National Protocol must be updated prior to reducing the booster interval. Booster vaccination of cohort 11 and 12 should not commence until opening of cohort 11 and 12 has been confirmed.
* Regions are asked to confirm immediately to sites that vaccine allocation will be available to meet the needs of individuals who have booked appointments up to and including the end of January.

**Hospital Hubs/Hospital Hubs+**

* No change to the Service Specification is required and sites are asked to review capacity and extend the booster offer.
* Hospital consultants are required to continue identifying individuals in their care who are eligible for a third primary COVID-19 vaccination.

**Making every contact count (MECC)**

* The COVID-19 Vaccination Programme provides an opportunity to engage with communities and deliver health promotion interventions during the 15 min observation period.
* Interventions delivered should not impact upon vaccination levels or throughput, however, if you are interested in piloting MECC interventions, please contact your local commissioner. Talk to your regional team if you are interested in piloting opportunistic blood pressure checks and hypertension management as we are keen to expand our current pilot. In addition, we will be sending vaccination sites posters and leaflets to display in your waiting rooms in support of early cancer diagnosis (prostate cancer) and hypertension case finding, these are two clinical focus areas in our Core20PLUS5 approach to tackling health inequalities. More information on the Core20PLUS5 can be found [here](https://www.england.nhs.uk/about/equality/equality-hub/core20plus5/).

If you have any questions, please contact:

Vaccination Centres (VCs): [england.vaccinecentresgroupsupport@nhs.net](mailto:england.vaccinecentresgroupsupport@nhs.net)

Local Vaccination Centres (Primary Care/ Community Pharmacies): [england.pccovidvaccine@nhs.net](mailto:england.pccovidvaccine@nhs.net)