The NHS COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

Primary care patient communications toolkit

V1 - 10 December 2020

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# **Introduction**

Following extensive trials, the first safe and effective vaccine for COVID-19 has been approved by regulators and is now available to priority groups. The first stage of roll-out of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is being managed via a limited number of hospital hubs. They will be initially prioritising those the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and government has decided will benefit the most – specifically over-80s, care home residents and staff.

In the week beginning 14 December 2020, the first local vaccination services (based on primary care network (PCN) groupings) will start, led by GPs, practice nurses and community pharmacists, with other services to follow over the coming weeks.

Colleagues across the NHS are doing an incredible job to deliver what it is the largest vaccination programme in our history, and we thank them once again for their efforts.

# **Primary care and the vaccine delivery**

The COVID-19 vaccination programme is the largest vaccination programme in the NHS’ 72-year history and it will involve NHS staff from all across the country and in different roles. In primary care this could be GPs, nurses, community pharmacists, paramedics and more. Local vaccination services, which are based on PCN groupings, will be delivering the vaccine from all types of venues, from GP practices and health centres, to sports halls and community venues.

This toolkit has been developed to support primary care (including general practice, community pharmacy and PCNs) in talking to patients about the COVID-19 vaccine.

Although some staff may not be involved in the delivery of the vaccine, it is important that ALL primary care staff are aware of the key patient facing messages as it will be primary care that most people will come to with questions around the vaccine. This toolkit should help you to explain to patients how the programme is running and what they should expect. We are all responsible for ensuring the public are confident about receiving a vaccine, and what the process is for this first phase.

# **Media enquiry holding lines with regards to sites**

A spokesperson for X CCG, said: “A number of local practices are starting to invite and book eligible patients in for the first dose of their COVID vaccine prior to its arrival next week; those invited will be patients over the age of 80, in line with the JCVI recommendation.

“The NHS will let you know when it's your turn to have the vaccine. It's important not to contact the NHS for a vaccination before then.”

# **Key patient messages**

The public have an important part to play to help the NHS to deliver the vaccination programme.

The key overarching messages for patients are:

* please don’t contact the NHS to seek a vaccine, we will contact you;
* when we do contact you, please attend your booked appointments;
* and please continue to follow all the guidance to control the spread of the virus and save lives.

## Dealing with requests for vaccinations

The following copy could be used as a script for recorded messages or for sharing with staff who may be answering calls from members of the public, or in other formats as makes sense in your organisation.

* The first phase of the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme has started
* The vaccination might not be delivered by your local GP surgery but at another location
* When it is the right time for you, you will receive an invitation to come forward and told where to go and what to do
* For most people this will be a letter, either from their GP or the national NHS.
* This letter will include all the information you will need to book appointments, including your NHS number.
* Please do not contact the NHS to get an appointment until you are contacted
* Information on the vaccine is available on the NHS.UK website

## Example website and newsletter copy

Following extensive trials, the first safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine has been approved in the UK and is now available to priority groups.

Vaccinations are being delivered according to [priority groups](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-why-you-are-being-asked-to-wait/why-you-have-to-wait-for-your-covid-19-vaccine) identified by the Joint Committee of Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The vaccinations may not take place at your GP practice, but rather a local vaccination service (led by GPs, practice nurses and community pharmacists) who are responsible for delivering the vaccine to people in your community.

When it is the right time for you to receive your vaccination, you will receive an invitation to come forward. This may be via the phone, or through a letter either from your GP or the national booking system.

We know lots of people will be eager to get protected but we are asking people not to contact us to get an appointment as you will not be able to get one until you are contacted.

## Answerphone message

You may want to update your answerphone message to address the vaccine if you are not a designated vaccine delivery site.

“If you are calling about the NHS COVID-19 vaccine, please note that we are not giving the vaccine at our practice. When it is the right time for you to receive your vaccination, you will receive an invitation to come forward. Information on the vaccine is available on the NHS.UK website.”

## SMS message

Dear patient. The first phase of the NHS COVID-19 vaccination programme has started in the UK. When it is the right time for you to receive the vaccine, you will receive an invitation to come forward. Please do not contact us to get an appointment until you are contacted. Information on the vaccine is available on the NHS.UK website. For anything else, your GP practice is open and if you need to get in touch, please ring us on xxx or visit our website [www.xxxx.nhs.uk](http://www.xxxx.nhs.uk). Please do not come to the surgery unless you have an appointment.

## Social media

* The NHS has started the first phase of the COVID-19 vaccination programme. When it is the right time for you to receive your vaccine, you will receive an invitation to come forward. Please do not contact the NHS to get an appointment until you are contacted.
* The NHS is prioritising the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. When it is your turn to get the vaccine you will be contacted. This may be by phone or letter from your GP or national NHS booking service.

 (Example graphic to use)

# **Vaccine delivery sites**

## Patient engagement

For PCN groupings who have volunteered and been stood up to deliver the vaccine, you will need to communicate with patients who are in the first phase priority groups to get vaccinated.

You will be responsible for appointment booking at the designated site and your combined PCN grouping patient list will inform the local call and recall exercise.

We recommend that you start booking patients into your vaccination clinic at the latest 5 days before the start of your vaccination clinic. [Template patient letters are available](https://future.nhs.uk/P_C_N/view?objectID=87845989), however due to the tight timescales, some PCN groupings may need to contact their patients over the phone to book these appointments.

## Phone script to book appointments

The following text may be helpful for those calling to book appointments.

* I am calling to book your free NHS coronavirus vaccine.
* Evidence shows that the risk of serious illness from coronavirus increases with age and experts recommend that people in your age group are among the first to get the vaccine.

**OR (depending on cohort)**

Evidence shows that the risk of serious illness from coronavirus increases if you are living with certain medical conditions and experts recommend that people with your condition(s) should get the vaccine.

* I can book your appointment for you now.
* Or if you would rather book yourself you can do this online at [**www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination**](http://www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination)or by phoning **119** free of charge.
* When you book, you will need:
  + your name and date of birth
  + your NHS number

If booked over the phone, please confirm they are able to get to the vaccination service, or if they will need assistance.

You should inform patients that they will need 2 doses of the vaccine to get the best protection from the virus. Each dose must be at least 21 days apart. When booking their first appointment, you will also need to book their second appointment.

## Other considerations when booking appointments

PCN sites will be responsible for checking that all eligible patients have an appointment and issue a recall invitation or re-contacting the patients where they have not.

You should send booking reminders before each appointment for dose 1 and 2. Individuals should also be informed during booking of the process for rebooking/changing appointments if necessary.

Informed consent is appropriate, and this can be verbal (implied). As part of the cohort identification process, you should also highlight any patients who may lack capacity to give their consent at the time of vaccination.

# **Campaign materials for patients**

Public Health England (PHE) has created a number of leaflets for patients which can be viewed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/covid-19-vaccination-programme>

The leaflets will also be available soon in a number of different languages, as well as Braille and Easy Read versions, and a British Sign Language video.

We will deliver an initial quantity of leaflets to your site and will advise you when to expect this delivery and will confirm the ordering process for subsequent batches. Please ensure relevant staff familiarise themselves with the content of the leaflets.

# **Branding guidance for vaccination services**

Patients and the public expect and want the NHS Identity to be applied in a consistent and uniform way – it reassures them that they can rely on the quality of healthcare being provided wherever they access it. Therefore, it is important that the different vaccination delivery models are clearly and consistently NHS branded.

Branding guidance is available for community and primary care-led services, which includes a single NHS COVID-19 Vaccination Service logo. This ensures a consistent branding approach, reflects this is a national service, locally delivered and negates the need for individual Vaccination Services having to produce individual logos, therefore saving time and money.

You can access the branding guidance and logos on the [COVID-19 Vaccination Programme on FutureNHS](https://future.nhs.uk/P_C_N/view?objectId=24040464).

# **Useful links**

COVID-19 Vaccination Programme on FutureNHS (resources for primary care) - <https://future.nhs.uk/P_C_N/view?objectId=23714448>

Primary care bulletin - <https://www.england.nhs.uk/email-bulletins/primary-care-bulletin/>

The Green Book chapter on COVID-19: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a>

Information for UK healthcare professionals: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/940565/Information_for_Healthcare_Professionals_on_Pfizer_BioNTech_COVID-19_vaccine.pdf>

Priority groups for coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination: advice from the JCVI: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/priority-groups-for-coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-advice-from-the-jcvi-2-december-2020>

COVID-19 vaccination e-learning programme: <https://www.e-lfh.org.uk/programmes/covid-19-vaccination/>

# **FAQs for patients**

**How will patients be invited for a vaccination?**

When it is the right time people will receive an invitation to come forward. For most people this will be in the form of a letter either from their GP or the national booking system; this will include all the information they need, including their NHS number.

We know lots of people will be eager to get protected but we are asking people not to contact the NHS to get an appointment until they get their letter.

**Is the NHS confident the vaccine is safe?**

Yes. The NHS will not offer any Covid-19 vaccinations to the public until experts have signed off that it is safe to do so.  The MHRA, the official UK regulator, have said this vaccine is very safe and highly effective, and we have full confidence in their expert judgement and processes.

As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process, and continued monitoring once it has been authorised and is being used in the wider population.

**How long does the vaccine take to become effective?**

The COVID-19 vaccination will reduce the chance of your suffering from COVID-19 disease. You may not be protected until at least seven days after your second dose of the vaccine.

**Why is it important to get your COVID-19 vaccination?**

If you’re a frontline worker in the NHS, you are more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 at work.

Getting your COVID-19 vaccination as soon as you can, should protect you and may help to protect your family and those you care for.

The COVID-19 vaccine should help reduce the rates of serious illness and save lives and will therefore reduce pressure on the NHS and social care services.

**Is the vaccine vegan/vegetarian friendly?**

Yes, the Pfizer vaccine does not contain any meat derivatives or porcine products.

If, and when, further vaccines are approved we will publish information about known allergens or ingredients that are important for certain faiths, cultures and beliefs.

**Who cannot have the vaccine?**

The COVID-19 vaccination is not recommended for women who are pregnant.

People who are suffering from a fever-type illness should also postpone having the vaccine until they have recovered.

**How effective is the COVID-19 vaccine?**

This is all included in the information published by the MHRA, and Public Health England will also be publishing more resources for patients and professionals. People can be assured the NHS will ensure that they have all the necessary information on those vaccines that are approved by the MHRA before they attend for their vaccination.

**Is the NHS confident the vaccine will be safe?**

Yes. The NHS would not offer any COVID-19 vaccinations to the public until it is safe to do so. The MHRA, the official UK regulator authorising licensed use of medicines and vaccines by healthcare professionals, has made this decision, and we have full confidence in their expert judgement and processes.

As with any medicine, vaccines are highly regulated products. There are checks at every stage in the development and manufacturing process.

**What is the evidence to show the vaccine is safe for BAME communities?**

The phase three study of the Pfizer BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine demonstrated a vaccine efficacy of 95%, with consistent efficacy across age, gender and ethnicity. Overall, among the participants who received the COVID-19 vaccine 82.1% were White, 9.6% were Black or African American, 26.1% were Hispanic/Latino, 4.3% were Asian and 0.7% were Native American/Alaskan.

**I’m currently ill with COVID-19, can I get the vaccine?**

People currently unwell and experiencing COVID-19 symptoms should not receive the COVID-19 vaccine until they have recovered.

**Do people who have already had COVID-19 get vaccinated?**

Yes, they should get vaccinated. There is no evidence of any safety concerns from vaccinating individuals with a past history of COVID-19 infection, or with detectable COVID-19 antibody, so people who have had COVID-19 disease (whether confirmed or suspected) can still receive the COVID-19 vaccine when it is their time to do so.

**Are there any known or anticipated side effects?**

Like all medicines, vaccines can cause side effects. Most of these are mild and short-term, and not everyone gets them. Even if you do have symptoms after the first dose, you still need to have the second dose. You may not be protected until at least seven days after your second dose of the vaccine.

Very common side effects include:

* Having a painful, heavy feeling and tenderness in the arm where you had your injection. This tends to be worst around 1-2 days after the vaccine
* Feeling tired
* Headache
* General aches, or mild flu like symptoms

As with all vaccines, appropriate treatment and care will be available in case of a rare anaphylactic event following administration.

**How many doses of the vaccine will be required and when?**

You are required to have two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, 21 days apart. You may not be protected until at least seven days after your second dose of vaccine.

**I have had my flu vaccine, do I need the COVID-19 vaccine as well?**

The flu vaccine does not protect you from COVID-19. As you are eligible for both vaccines you should have them both, but normally separated by at least a week.

**Will the COVID-19 vaccine protect me from flu?**

No, the COVID-19 vaccine will not protect you against the flu. If you have been offered a flu vaccine, please try to have this as soon as possible to help protect you, your family and patients from flu this winter.