

Frequently asked questions for under 16's under Paediatric Rheumatology and Ophthalmology Care – 11th Feb 2021

It is reassuring that there is no evidence that children and young people with rheumatological/ ophthalmological or inflammatory conditions are more likely to contract COVID 19 than those without. If children and young people (CYP) with rheumatological/ ophthalmological or inflammatory conditions do become infected with COVID 19 there is no evidence they will become more unwell compared to children without these conditions and this includes those on immunosuppressive medications.

Evidence from the Royal College of Paediatrics and Paediatric Rheumatology Consultants from across the United Kingdom agree that children with Rheumatological Conditions on immunosuppression do NOT fall into the Extremely Clinical Vulnerable group and therefore they do not need to shield.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-consortium-statement-on-covid-19-vaccines-evidence/access-consortium-statement-on-covid-19-vaccines-evidence>

Every CYP is an individual and so if your child has been advised they are clinically vulnerable by their rheumatology team for a specific reason or by a different specialist for another condition, then that advice should be followed.

Therefore we would hope that your child or young person does not receive a Clinically Extremely Vulnerable letter or a shielding letter. If they do you should always refer back to your specialist Team for advice.

1. Can my child have the vaccine when it is offered?

Not yet, if they are aged under 16 years of age, as almost no children are being vaccinated yet. Once children are offered the vaccine then, yes. Please note that at present the Pfizer vaccine is approved for age 16 and over but the AstraZeneca Oxford and the Moderna vaccines are approved for ages 18 and above. As trial data from younger people become available the approvals may change.

2. My child has been identified as CEV (clinically Extremely Vulnerable) and is shielding – can they get the vaccine?

Not yet, if they are aged under 16 years of age as almost no children are being vaccinated yet. Once children are offered the vaccine then yes. **Note that the vast majority of children under the care of paediatric rheumatology/ophthalmology should not be shielding:** only a handful of children or young people will be shielding, if they have been personally advised to do so by their clinical team in paediatric rheumatology/ophthalmology, or another specialty team

3. My child normally has to have flu vaccine every year – why aren't they being prioritised for the COVID vaccine?

Coronavirus is different from 'flu and these two illnesses impact different parts of the population in different ways. As children (including those on immune suppression) appear to be at much lower risk from COVID they are not currently being prioritised for the COVID vaccine. As noted above, at present the Pfizer vaccine is approved for age 16 and over but the AstraZeneca/Oxford and the Moderna vaccines are approved for ages 18 and above. As trial data from younger people become available the approvals may change. Advice is likely

to continue to change over time so please check here (GOVT shielding website) for the latest advice.

4. Can my child's older siblings have the vaccine?

Not yet, if they are under 16 years of age, as almost no children are being vaccinated yet. Once children are offered the vaccine then, yes. but advice is likely to continue to change over time so please check here (GOVT shielding website) for the latest advice.

5. As a carer for my child, do I get the vaccine sooner?

Not yet, but you will be offered it according to where you fall in the priority groups as defined by the government, this is an ever and fast changing area and will as a result be subject to change.

6. Is it safe for my child to be in close contact with people who have had the vaccine?

For now the advice is that those who have had the vaccine can carry the virus that causes COVID-19, and could pass it on, so are advised to still practice social distancing and wear a mask. However your child is not at more risk than other children. It is important for everyone to consider risks to elderly or vulnerable members of the family before reuniting with family members once lockdown lifts and continue to follow national guidance regarding social distancing, mask wearing and frequent handwashing etc

7. When my child/YP is offered the vaccine does it count as a live vaccine?

No. None of the currently licenced vaccines are deemed live by PHE/experts, and so can be given to those on Immune suppressive medicines once they are invited to have the vaccine.

Useful Links –

<http://arma.uk.net/covid-19-vaccination-and-msk/>

<https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/coronavirus-vaccination-programme-statement>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/access-consortium-statement-on-covid-19-vaccines-evidence/access-consortium-statement-on-covid-19-vaccines-evidence>