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Covid-19: Booster vaccine to be rolled out in autumn as UK secures 60m more Pfizer doses

Elisabeth Mahase

The UK will roll out a covid-19 booster vaccine at the beginning of autumn in order to protect the most vulnerable ahead of winter, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has announced.

As part of this, the government's vaccines taskforce has secured an additional 60m doses of the Pfizer BioNTech vaccine, which will be used alongside the other vaccines already purchased.

Details on how the programme will work have not yet been made public, however the DHSC said the booster dose will be given based on clinical need.

The BMJ revealed in March that a covid-19 booster vaccine would likely be rolled out in the autumn to avoid another winter surge.¹

The final policy will be informed by advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation and the results of clinical trials assessing the impact of mixing approved covid-19 vaccines.

Health secretary Matt Hancock said, "Our vaccination programme is bringing back our freedom, but the biggest risk to that progress is posed by a new variant.

"We're working on our plans for booster shots, which are the best way to keep us safe and free while we get this disease under control across the whole world. These further 60m doses will be used, alongside others, as part of our booster programme from later this year, so we can protect the progress that we've all made."

Vaccines minister Nadhim Zahawi said, "We are doing everything we can to make sure the most vulnerable are protected from covid-19 now and in the future. In the meantime, we are making great progress with our vaccination rollout and I urge everybody to get their vaccines as soon as they are eligible."

The UK has secured deals for 517 million doses of eight different covid-19 vaccines or candidate vaccines for a population of 67m people. This includes 100m doses of the Pfizer vaccine, 100m of the Oxford AstraZeneca, 17m of the Moderna, 30m of the Janssen, 60m of the Novavax, 100m of the Valneva candidate, 60m of the GlaxoSmithKline and Sanofi Pasteur candidate, and 50m of the CureVac candidate.

The new deal comes as the World Health Organization criticised the "shocking imbalance in the global distribution of vaccines" and called for distribution to be fairer.

"On average, in high income countries almost one in four people have received a covid-19 vaccine. In low income countries it's one in more than 500," WHO director general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said in a press conference earlier this month.

¹ Mahase E. Covid-19: Booster dose will be needed in autumn to avoid winter surge, says government adviser. *BMJ* 2021;372:n664. doi:10.1136/bmj.n664 pmid: 33687925

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