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Covid-19: JCVI opts not to recommend universal vaccination of 12-15 year olds

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The UK's Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has not recommended that all young people aged 12-15 are given the covid-19 vaccination, and it has instead asked ministers to seek further advice from the UK's chief medical officers on the wider potential benefits of vaccination.

On Friday 3 September the government said that it had received advice from the independent JCVI that the health benefits of vaccination were “marginally greater than the potential known harms.” But the committee advised ministers to seek further input from the chief medical officers on the wider effects, including the impact on schools and young people's education.

In the wake of the JCVI's advice, health ministers from the four UK nations have written to the chief medical officers to request that they begin assessing the broader impact of universal covid-19 vaccination in the 12-15 age group. The officers will now convene experts and senior leaders in clinical and public health to consider the issue and will present their advice to ministers on whether a universal programme should be taken forward.

Children aged 12-15 who are clinically vulnerable to covid-19 or who live with adults with an increased risk of serious illness from the virus are already eligible for a covid-19 vaccine and are being contacted by the NHS to be invited to come forward. The JCVI recommended on 3 September that this offer should be expanded to include more children aged 12-15, such as those with sickle cell disease or type 1 diabetes.

Wider benefits

England's health and social care secretary, Sajid Javid, said, “Our covid-19 vaccines have brought a wide range of benefits to the country, from saving lives and preventing hospitalisations to helping stop infections and allowing children to return to school.

“I am grateful for the expert advice that I have received from JCVI. We will then consider the advice from the chief medical officers, building on the advice, before making a decision shortly.”

Scotland's health secretary, Humza Yousaf, said, “While the JCVI has agreed that the benefits marginally outweigh the risks, they are not yet prepared to recommend universal vaccination of 12-15 year olds; however, they have suggested that health ministers may wish to ask their respective CMOs [chief medical officers] to explore the issue further, taking into consideration broader educational and societal impacts. We have asked for this further work to be conducted as soon as possible.”

Northern Ireland's health secretary, Robin Swann, said, “I welcome the extension of the vaccination programme to include a wider group of children aged 12-15 years of age with underlying medical conditions. I am also grateful for the JCVI advice on 12-15 year olds and agree that this issue warrants further consideration.”

Eluned Morgan, the Welsh government's health minister, said, “Our intention, as it has been from the start of the pandemic, is to follow the science and evidence, and I have asked my chief medical officer to provide guidance at the earliest opportunity on the clinical and wider health benefits of vaccinating this age group.”