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Covid-19: England is preparing to offer annual booster vaccination, says NHS boss

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The NHS in England is preparing to offer an annual covid-19 booster vaccine programme if one is required, the service's chief executive has said.

Amanda Pritchard also said that there could be "further expansions" to the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advice on which groups should receive booster vaccines. Officials are awaiting more data before deciding whether annual covid-19 vaccine boosters will be recommended in a similar way to the annual winter flu vaccination programme.

But in speech to the NHS Providers annual conference on 16 November, Pritchard said that the NHS was already mobilising itself in preparation. "We've just had the latest advice yesterday from JCVI on extending boosters to the over 40s, as well as giving second doses to 16 and 17 year olds, and I think we can probably expect further expansions in the future," she said. "We are already thinking about how we can do annual booster vaccines, if they are needed. And of course we continue to make that evergreen offer to people who are yet to come forward for any or all of the doses they are eligible for."

The vaccination programme was identified as one of Pritchard's four key priorities for the NHS in England, alongside dealing with this winter's pressures, tackling the backlog in elective care, and the ongoing transformation of services.

In a wide ranging speech, Pritchard paid tribute to the "determination, resilience, and commitment" of the NHS workforce during the pandemic over the past 18 months, but said, "it is unfair to ask our staff to keep working so hard." She added, "We do need the right number and we need the right mix of staff to be able to deliver the models and quality of care we want to deliver for our patients. And we do need a workforce plan to deliver that. The secretary of state made an important commitment earlier this month to finalise a long term supply plan by spring, and it's crucial we get this right."