

Colin Cox • Director of Public Health • Cumbria County Council
107-117 Botchergate • Carlisle • CA1 1RD

03 March 2021

Dear School Leaders,

COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

There has been a lot of potentially conflicting information circulating about COVID-19 vaccination availability and eligibility. In order to provide some assurance around this, I would like to clarify some of the processes and explain the way in which decisions have been made.

The COVID-19 vaccination programme is being rolled out by the NHS in accordance with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation's (JCVI) nationally identified priorities – which can be found [here](#). The programme aims to protect individuals who are most at risk of hospitalisations and death as a result of COVID-19. This means the most effective way to vaccinate the adult population is to prioritise by age and clinical vulnerability, rather than profession. Any deviation from the agreed approach would mean the vaccine is being diverted from high risk groups to those less at risk.

Cohort 2 – defining eligible staff

Working from the JCVI priorities the County Council is currently engaged in identifying staff who fall under the latest national definition of social care workers for cohort 2. This is a narrower definition than that of a key or essential worker and is set out below:

- All frontline social care workers directly working with people clinically vulnerable to COVID-19 who need care and support irrespective of where they work (for example in people's own homes, day centres, care homes for working age adults or supported housing); whether they care for clinically vulnerable adults or children; or who they are employed by (for example local government, NHS private sector or third sector employees)

The following are examples of those who are not eligible within this priority group as frontline social care workers:

- Administrative staff who do not have any direct contact with clients.
- Social care workers working with children who are not at higher risk for COVID-19
- Unpaid carers
- People providing home help, such as shopping or cleaning,
- Early years workers (e.g. childminders and nursery workers) who are not working with children at higher risk for COVID-19
- Teachers, teaching assistants and other school staff who are not working with children at higher risk for COVID-19
- People who work exclusively from home with no direct client contact

These national criteria mean that the majority of staff working in mainstream schools do not meet the Cohort 2 eligibility criteria.

Some staff who work in these settings have been approached directly by either the Hospital Trusts or their GPs and may have received vaccinations. This has led to some confusion about eligibility and we are sorry that this confusion has occurred.

However, despite the inconsistencies that may have arisen as a result of these actions, the national position is clear that the above staff do not form part of the cohort that is eligible.

I know you will be concerned about the wellbeing of the children attending your setting who are classed as clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV). The advice for pupils who have been confirmed as CEV is to shield and stay at home as much as possible until further notice. They are advised not to attend school while shielding advice applies nationally.

Reserve waiting lists for vaccination

We have received a number of queries in relation to vaccination waiting lists. I have been advised that GP practices do have a 'reserve list' in case of 'Do Not Attends' to avoid vaccine being wasted at the end of the sessions. The reserve lists are not open to all individuals. They are drawn from JCVI cohorts which are currently being vaccinated. Therefore, at the moment, the reserve list is available to individuals in JCVI priority cohort groups 1-6.

Staff involved in LFT testing in school settings

There is information circulating via social media that if teachers are involved in LFT testing in schools they can book and get a vaccine as they qualify as healthcare staff.

People who work at a symptomatic COVID-19 testing site qualify as healthcare workers. However, LFT is designed for people who are asymptomatic, therefore people working on this in schools would not qualify as healthcare workers under the eligibility criteria. Therefore, these staff do not fall into a JCVI priority cohort so would not be eligible for a vaccination separately to other factors such as age or clinical vulnerability.

Concerns about second dose availability

Some people in Cumbria who have already received one dose of the vaccine have raised concerns that they do not yet have an appointment for their second vaccine. NHS plans for vaccination roll-out include capacity for second dose appointments and I would like to offer reassurance that those who have already had their first dose will be invited for their second dose as required in due course.

Keeping staff and pupils in school settings safe

As schools are due to fully re-open on the 8th March, I know many school leaders are thinking about how they can keep their staff and pupils safe. I also wanted to acknowledge the incredible amount of hard work I know you have undertaken over the past 12 months to make your settings as COVID-safe as possible. To offer some degree of reassurance, I do not expect to see as many cases in school settings as we did between September and December 2020 due to the following factors:

- LFT testing programmes are now in place to help identify asymptomatic infections
- Wider use of face coverings is now advised in school settings
- Lockdown measures will continue to be in place for some time and the relaxation of any of these measures are planned to happen gradually (and only when certain conditions are met)
- We are moving into the Spring/Summer period where we generally see less viral transmission
- The vaccine programme is being rolled-out in the UK very quickly and all adults are expected to have been offered their first dose by the end of July 2021 (well before the next Autumn/Winter period).

Thank you for all you and your staff continue to do to protect your school community. I hope this information helps answer the questions many of you have, however if you have any queries, please email Vaccinations@cumbria.gov.uk or contact the public health team via EducationIPC@cumbria.gov.uk.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Colin Cox', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Colin Cox
Director of Public Health
Cumbria County Council