

Statement from JCVI on immunisation prioritisation

Maintain immunisation services to reduce the serious risk of vaccine-preventable disease.

We know that many of you will be involved in providing health services to known or suspected cases of COVID-19 infection while maintaining essential services.

During this time it is very important to maintain our national immunisation programme. This will avoid outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases and allow us to provide important protection to children and other vulnerable groups. It will also avoid increasing further the numbers of patients requiring health services because of vaccine-preventable diseases.

The national immunisation programme is highly successful in reducing the incidence of serious and sometimes life-threatening diseases such as pneumococcal and meningococcal infections, whooping cough, diphtheria and measles. It is important to maintain the best possible vaccine uptake to prevent a resurgence of these infections.

The routine immunisation programme should be maintained. Where practices experience high demand on services, it is important to prioritise time sensitive vaccines for babies, children and pregnant women:

1. routine childhood immunisations (to include targeted neonatal hepatitis B and BCG), from birth up to and including vaccines offered to babies, infants and pre-school children including first and second MMR doses;
2. pertussis vaccination in pregnancy;
3. pneumococcal vaccination for those in risk groups from 2 to 64 years of age and those aged 65 years and over (subject to supplies of PPV23 and clinical prioritisation).

If people present for any other scheduled vaccination, the opportunity to provide this should not be missed.

Providing those attending for vaccination (including parents of babies) are well, are not displaying symptoms of COVID-19 or other infections and are not self-isolating because they are contacts of suspected COVID-19 cases, immunisation should proceed.

Most children suffer from a very minor illness with COVID19. If immunisation services lapse, there will be consequential substantially increased risk to health from vaccine-preventable diseases. It is vital that we sustain services.

We ask that you continue to offer these vaccinations, maintaining the highest uptake possible and providing this important protection to our population.