# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **COVID-19 Vaccination – JCVI further advice on Boosters**  |
| **DATE**  | **29 November 2021** |
| **BY** | **Eluned Morgan, Minister for Health and Social Services** |

Today I would like to update members on further advice announced by the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). In light of the threat posed by the new Variant of Concern, Omicron, the JCVI was asked to rapidly review the UK COVID-19 Vaccination programme.

The Committee was asked to look at what changes, if any, were needed to the programme and advise on a strategy to save lives, protect the NHS and reduce infection as far as possible, before the peak of any impending Omicron wave.

The JCVI has recommended an acceleration to the vaccination programme through a number of ways outlined below:

* All adults over 18 are now eligible for a booster, though priority should still be given to older adults and those at risk;
* Booster doses should be offered at a reduced minimum of three months after completion of the primary course;
* Individuals who are severely immunosuppressed who have completed their primary course of three doses should be offered a booster dose, with a minimum of three months between the third primary and booster dose, in line with clinical advice on optimal timing;
* Both the Moderna and Pfizer-BioNTech vaccines should be used with equal preference in the COVID-19 booster programme. Both vaccines have been shown to substantially increase antibody levels when offered as a booster dose.

In addition, JCVI advises, as a secondary measure, that subject to appropriate consideration by deployment teams regarding feasibility, all children and young people aged 12 to 15 years should be offered a second dose of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine at a minimum of 12 weeks from the first dose. The interval for this group (and 16-17s) may be reduced to at least 8 weeks between doses if supported by the emerging epidemiological data.

The extent of protection COVID-19 vaccines will provide against the Omicron variant is not yet known, but the JCVI felt that accelerating the programme would maximise protection for individuals. Through extending eligibility and reducing the interval for booster, the aim is to reduce the impact of the new variant on the population, ahead of a wave of infection. The JCVI will continue to monitor the position as more data becomes available.

We will continue to follow the clinical and scientific evidence, as we have since the start of the pandemic. I have accepted the recommendations of the JCVI, in line with the other nations of the UK. NHS Wales will do all that is necessary to increase capacity to implement this advice.

All individuals who are eligible for a booster will automatically receive an invitation to attend an appointment when it is their turn. Those who have already been given a booster appointment should attend on the date and time given. Appointments for all others now eligible will be scheduled by their health board in line with the latest JCVI advice and in accordance with their age and clinical vulnerability. There is no need to call your health board or GP to check if you have an appointment; you will be contacted when it is your turn. Our vaccination teams are continuing to make sure the appropriate vaccine is available at the right time for people at their appointments.

Given the JCVI’s updated advice, there will be a significant number of vaccination appointments issuing over the coming weeks. To help our NHS, I ask people to keep their allocated appointment wherever possible. However, I expect our text message rescheduling service to go live tomorrow this means that from Wednesday, you will have the option to reschedule your appointment by text if you are not able to make your allocated appointment.

Now more than ever, with the threat of this new variant, it is important that people come forward for their appointments when called, especially those who have yet to take up their first dose. If you have not had a first or second dose, it is not too late to contact your health board to arrange an appointment. No one who chooses to be vaccinated will be left behind. Vaccination teams can answer any questions you may have about vaccination and support you to get vaccinated. Most mass vaccination centres have quiet areas for people to sit whilst waiting and many also have specialist nurses in attendance, to assist those who may need some extra support. Together we will keep Wales safe.

Tomorrow I will publish the latest version of our fortnightly COVID-19 vaccination programme [update](https://gov.wales/covid-19-vaccination-programme-updates).