Seasonal COVID-19 boosters for people at increased risk

COVID-19 is still with us and is still making people very ill.

So, those at increased risk from COVID-19, for example due to a health condition or medical treatment, are eligible for a seasonal booster for extra protection this winter, when viruses spread much more easily and can cause greater harm.

This includes people who are pregnant, people who have a lung or heart condition, kidney or liver disease, problems with the brain or nerves, a learning disability, diabetes or a severe mental illness. It also includes people with weakened immune systems and the people they live with aged 5 and over.

If you’re not sure if you’re at increased risk, you can find out more at www.england.nhs.uk/covid-increased-risk (and for a full list of conditions and criteria, please see Tables 3 and 4 of the UK Health Security Agency’s Green Book).

If you are eligible, it is important to top up your protection even if you have had earlier vaccinations or have had the virus, as your immunity from these fades over time.

It can take 14 days for the vaccination to take full effect, so everyone due a further dose is encouraged to get it as early as possible for maximum protection, for example when socialising indoors with vulnerable loved ones.

How to get your next COVID-19 vaccination

You can have your seasonal COVID-19 vaccine if it's been at least three months since you had your previous dose.

If you haven’t already booked an appointment:

· Choose ‘Book or manage a coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination’ via the homepage of the NHS App

· Book online at www.nhs.uk/book-covid-booster

· Call 119

· Or find a walk-in service at www.nhs.uk/vaccine-walk-in

Contact your GP practice if you need a home vaccination.

If you had a severely weakened immune system when you got your first or second dose, you should get an additional third primary dose before you get any booster.

What to bring to your vaccination appointment

It can help to bring your NHS invitation, an NHS letter describing your condition or treatment, or a repeat prescription slip or medicine box with a recent date and your name on it. If you don’t have any of these things, you should still be able to get vaccinated, but you may need to speak to a healthcare professional first.

For more information, visit www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination.

Encourage people you live with to get vaccinated ahead of winter

If you have a health condition that weakens your immune system (such as leukaemia), are receiving medical treatment (such as steroid medicine, biological therapy, chemotherapy or radiotherapy) or if you’ve had an organ or bone marrow transplant, the people you live with (aged 5 years and over) are eligible for a further COVID-19 vaccination this winter.

We need you to inform people you live with that they can get another dose. This will improve your protection from COVID-19.

The online booking service at www.nhs.uk/book-covid-booster allows people who live with someone who has a weakened immune system to book COVID-19 vaccination appointments.

The people you live with are not required to bring evidence to their vaccination appointment to prove that they live with you, but it could help to bring a copy of the NHS invitation sent to you.

Carers can book COVID-19 and flu vaccines ahead of winter

As a paid or unpaid carer or personal assistant, you’re more likely to be exposed to the flu and COVID-19 viruses. You also care for people who may be at greater risk and it’s easy to pass these viruses on without knowing.

The flu and COVID-19 vaccines are the best defence against these potentially life-threatening viruses for you and the people you care for. Both vaccines are now available to carers ahead of winter. If you haven’t got any earlier doses that you need of the COVID-19 vaccine, it’s not too late. You can get these right now and will be welcomed at a local vaccination site to get up to date.

You can book your COVID-19 booster at www.nhs.uk/book-covid-booster or call 119. You can also attend a walk-in vaccination site without needing an appointment. Find your nearest walk-in at www.nhs.uk/vaccine-walk-in. The flu vaccine may be offered at the same time but if not you can get this at a GP practice or a participating community pharmacy at another time. Some community pharmacies are now taking bookings online at www.nhs.uk/book-a-flu-vaccination or by calling 119.

It’s better to get what you need as soon as you can rather than waiting to have both at the same time.

Children in high-risk groups are entitled to a booster vaccination

Children are eligible for a further COVID-19 vaccination now if they have a health condition or are receiving medical treatment that puts them at increased risk from COVID-19.

COVID-19 is more serious for people with a weakened immune system and it may mean that your child is less able to fight off infection. This booster should reduce their risk of serious complications from COVID-19 that could lead to hospital admission.

You can book your child’s booster online at www.nhs.uk/book-covid-booster. Please answer ‘yes’ or ‘I think I might be’ when asked if your child is at high risk from COVID-19 when booking.

You can also attend a walk-in vaccination site without an appointment. Please check which sites are offering walk-ins before you attend at www.nhs.uk/vaccine-walk-in as not all of them do. The website shows which sites offer the vaccine to children aged 5 to 15.

What to bring to your child’s vaccination appointment

It can help if you bring your child’s NHS invitation, an NHS letter describing their condition or treatment, or a repeat prescription slip or medicine box with a recent date and their name on it. If you don’t have any of these things, you should still be able to get vaccinated, but you may need to speak to a healthcare professional first.

Flu vaccinations

Flu can be very dangerous and even life threatening for some, particularly people with certain health conditions. The flu vaccine is safe and effective, and it’s offered every year on the NHS to help protect people at risk of getting seriously ill from flu.

If you’re eligible, it’s important to get it every year because the viruses that cause flu change every year. This means the flu (and the vaccine) this year may be different from last year. It’s more important than ever to get the flu vaccine as fewer people will have built up natural immunity to it during the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 vaccines and the flu vaccine can be given on the same day for people who are eligible for both. The NHS is making it easier to receive both of these seasonal vaccinations at the same time. However, if getting both vaccines together is not possible, you should get each vaccination as soon as you can for better protection ahead of winter, rather than waiting.

You can get your flu vaccine at a participating local pharmacy or by booking an appointment at your GP practice. Some community pharmacies are now taking bookings online or from calls to 119. Go to www.nhs.uk/book-a-flu-vaccination.

For more information, go to: www.nhs.uk/flujab.

FAQs

Who can get the COVID-19 autumn booster?

Experts recommend a seasonal booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine if you are:

· aged 50 or over

· pregnant

· aged 5 to 49 and at high risk due to a health condition

· aged 5 to 49 and at high risk because of a weakened immune system

· aged 5 to 49 and live with someone who has a weakened immune system

· aged 16 to 49 and are a carer

· living or working in a care home for older people

· a frontline health and social care worker

Why do I need an autumn booster?

The COVID-19 vaccination programme has saved lives, helping tens of thousands to stay out of hospital, and enabling us to return to lives we knew before the pandemic began. However, the virus is still with us and is still making people very ill.

Scientists have warned that winter will remain the season when the threat from COVID-19 is greatest. Viruses like COVID-19 spread much more easily in winter when we socialise indoors, so it’s important that everyone eligible tops up their protection with an autumn booster.

If you are eligible, it is important to top up your protection even if you have had earlier vaccinations or have had the virus, as your immunity from these fades over time.

The aim is to protect everyone and to protect those at greatest risk from the virus against severe COVID-19 disease over winter. As well as protecting you and the people around you, vaccination also helps the NHS to take care of others by avoiding unnecessary hospital visits. This allows time and resources to be used elsewhere in winter.

Where will I receive my vaccine?

You are most likely to be offered your vaccine at a community pharmacy or at a local GP practice. You can find your nearest vaccination site when you book using the National Booking Service or by calling 119. Alternatively, you can find a walk-in vaccination site near you.

I do not respond well to vaccines. Why is it important to continue to get vaccinated?

If you have a weakened immune system due to a health condition or medical treatment, COVID-19 may affect you more seriously.

Even though you might not develop full immunity, you may continue to develop some immunity, so even a limited response to a further dose should help to reduce your risk of being severely ill or admitted to hospital if you catch COVID-19. Repeated vaccinations will gradually improve and maintain your level of antibodies and enhance the other parts of your immune system that protect you from COVID-19 infection.

Do I need to show evidence that I have a weakened immune system?

If you’re aged under 50, it can help if you bring your invitation, an NHS letter describing your condition or treatment, or a repeat prescription slip or medicine box with a recent date and your name on it. If you don’t have any of these things, you should still be able to get vaccinated, but you may need to speak to a healthcare professional first.

People I live with would like to get a further dose. Are they eligible?

Yes. Any household contacts aged 5 years and over can get the COVID-19 vaccine this autumn if they live with someone with a weakened immune system. Household contacts are people who share living accommodation on most days.

They are not required to bring evidence to their vaccination appointment, but it could help to bring a copy of the NHS invitation sent to the person they live with who has a weakened immune system.

Which booster vaccination will I be given?

Bivalent vaccines will be offered for winter boosters. These vaccines target both Omicron and the original strain of COVID-19.

If you’re eligible for a seasonal booster, getting vaccinated as early as possible ahead of winter, when viruses circulate most and cause greatest harm, is more important than the type of vaccine you receive. All of the available vaccines provide good protection against severe illness from COVID-19. Further information is available at www.nhs.uk/covidvaccination.

What will I be offered if I’m allergic to COVID-19 mRNA bivalent vaccines?

In rare cases where individuals have severe allergic reactions to mRNA bivalent vaccines, local vaccination services should refer you to specialist clinics where you may be offered Nuvaxovid as an alternative to mRNA vaccines. This will be in exceptional circumstances, where clinically appropriate. It is estimated that less than 1% of people will need a Nuvaxovid vaccine. You can find out more at www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/alternative-booster.

Is it safe to get so many doses of the COVID-19 vaccine?

COVID-19 vaccination is safe and has been approved for use by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, which regulates safety, and recommended by the JCVI. The vaccines used by the NHS have been rigorously tested and many millions of doses have been given across the UK and the world, with continued monitoring of safety.

I was previously advised to get an Astra Zeneca vaccine. Where can I get this?

The JCVI has published its advice on which vaccines should be used in this year’s autumn booster programme. Astra Zeneca is not being used from September 2022.

Do I need to receive the same type of vaccine or booster as my previous ones?

No, all COVID-19 vaccines authorised for use in the deployment programme have been widely tested and found to be highly effective and to provide a strong booster response. When you attend your appointment, the NHS will offer you a safe, effective vaccine.

How often can I get a booster dose?

In terms of further boosters after the autumn campaign, and optimum timings to deliver them, the JCVI will make evidence-based recommendations. They continuously review data to inform these recommendations to the government.

What adjustments are being made to support people during appointments?

The NHS is working hard to keep you safe when you go to get your vaccine. You can let staff know if there are any reasonable adjustments that could support you, such as:

* A      longer appointment
* Somewhere      quiet to sit while you wait
* Extra      support if you’re afraid of needles
* Or      asking if a carer, friend or support worker can accompany you.

You can ask staff on site to put on a mask if they’re not wearing one already. If you have a weakened immune system, you can also let staff know. They will try to reduce your wait time where possible. Vaccination sites have been asked to ensure that appropriate arrangements such as priority lanes are in place to support people who are less able to queue.

How do I get an autumn booster if I’m unable to leave my home?

If you’re unable to leave your home to get vaccinated and you think you’re eligible for a home vaccination, you should contact your GP practice for support in the first instance.

I’ve had COVID-19. Do I need to wait before having my autumn booster?

If you've recently had a confirmed COVID-19 infection, you should try to wait before getting any dose of the vaccine. Ideally, you should wait:

* 4 weeks (28 days) if you're aged 18 years old or      over
* 12 weeks (84 days) if you’re aged 5 to 17 years
* 4 weeks (28 days) if you’re aged 12 to 17 years      old and at greater risk from COVID-19

This starts from the date your symptoms started or from the date of a positive test, whichever was earlier. If you had some symptoms but you are not sure if you had COVID-19, you should still book a for vaccination once your symptoms are better and you can discuss this with a healthcare professional when you attend.

Can I have my flu vaccine and COVID-19 booster in the same appointment?

Yes, if you are eligible to receive these two vaccines, you may be offered both in the same appointment. It is safe to receive both vaccines in the same appointment, but it’s important that you do not wait to try and schedule both vaccinations at the same time as this may not be possible and could delay your protection over winter. Please take up the offer of each vaccine when you are invited, even if they are on different dates.

Please note, if you’re also receiving the shingles vaccine, or if you’ve been referred to a specialist clinic for a Nuvaxovid vaccine, it will not be possible to get your seasonal vaccinations at the same time.

I’m behind on my vaccines. What should I do?

Whether one of your vaccines is overdue or you haven’t had your first yet, please be assured that it isn’t too late. If you’ve not had a 1st or 2nd dose of the COVID-19 vaccine yet, you should make sure you have both as soon as possible. If you have had a severely weakened immune system, you should also get an additional third dose before you get any booster.

You can book an appointment for any dose you’re eligible for at www.nhs.uk/covid-vaccination or by phoning 119, or you can visit a walk-in vaccination site without an appointment – see www.nhs.uk/vaccine-walk-in.

When is the best time to receive my vaccine?

You should come forward for your next vaccine as soon as possible and shouldn’t delay getting it. The only exception to this is if you are receiving treatment that might affect how your immune system works. If this is the case, you should discuss the best time to be vaccinated with your clinician.

How long shall I wait between vaccinations?

If you’re eligible for a further COVID-19 vaccination this winter, you can come forward for your next dose if it has been at least 91 days since your last vaccination.

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