

UK to roll out COVID-19 vaccines to 16 and 17-year-olds

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In this Thursday, July 22, 2021 file photo, a health care worker fills a syringe with the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. The U.K. is to offer coronavirus vaccines to 16 and 17-year-olds it was announced Wednesday, Aug. 4 after the independent body of scientists that makes recommendations over the rollout changed its advice. The four nations of the U.K. all accepted the change in advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization for healthy 16 to 17-year-olds to be offered a first dose of the Pfizer vaccine, which has already been approved by Britain's medical regulator for use for anyone aged 12 and over. Credit: AP Photo/Mary Altaffer, File

The U.K. plans to offer coronavirus vaccines to 16 and 17-year-olds in the next few weeks after the independent body of scientists that makes vaccine recommendations to the government changed its advice.

The four nations of the U.K. all accepted the change from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunization, which now says healthy 16 to 17-year-olds can be offered a first dose of the Pfizer vaccine. They will not need [parental consent](#)

The change, which means another 1.4 million people across the U.K. will be eligible for a first vaccine shot, comes just two weeks after the JCVI recommended against routine vaccinations for those under 18, although it did stress that it would continually assess the evidence.

Currently, the only 16 and 17-year-olds being offered the Pfizer vaccine, which has been approved by Britain's medical regulator for anyone 12 and over, are those with underlying health conditions or those living with [vulnerable people](#).

"While COVID-19 is typically mild or asymptomatic in most young people, it can be very unpleasant for some and for this particular age group, we expect one dose of the vaccine to provide good protection against [severe illness](#) and hospitalization," said Professor Wei Shen Lim, who chairs the JCVI's COVID-19 program.

The timeline for when the 16 and 17-year-olds will get their second dose has yet to be determined but the scientists will make further recommendations later based on the response to the first dose.

While the British vaccine rollout has been one of the world's fastest—with 89% of adults having had one dose and 73% of adults fully vaccinated—the country has been fairly slow in offering vaccine jabs to youths. There have been growing calls for the vaccination drive to be expanded to [younger people](#) following a spike in infections this summer as a result of the more transmissible delta variant and the lifting of lockdown restrictions.

Despite Wednesday's change, the U.K. still lags many other European countries such as France and [Germany](#), which are offering vaccines to children 12 and over. Britain's JCVI said it will constantly review the data on vaccinating under-16s and update its position accordingly.

Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, England's deputy

chief medical officer, said there was "no time to waste" and that he expects the rollout to start in "a very short number of weeks," which will coincide with the reopening of schools after the summer break.

The expanded rollout comes amid evidence that the vaccination drive among younger adults in Britain has slowed down in recent weeks, a trend that's prompted the British government to offer incentives like discounts and free pizza to persuade young people to get the shot.

Wei Shen Lim, the JCVI's chair, said there had been feedback from some [young people](#) who want to have a choice.

"So, they'd like to be offered the [vaccine](#), understand the risks and potential benefits, and therefore make a choice for themselves whether they want to have it or not," he said.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, on a visit Wednesday to Scotland, backed the scientists on their revised position.

"I would just urge all families thinking about this across the country to listen to the JCVI," he said.

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