

COVID-19 booster programme: Frequently Asked Questions

17 December 2021

Are you ready to ramp up operations? Do you foresee difficulties in delivering these boosters?

Our team was already working on scenarios for increasing vaccinations in the event of an announcement like the one made on 12 December. We have already ramped up vaccination capacity in our area following the latest booster announcement, this includes 6,000 vaccination appointments being added to the National Booking System for large sites on Monday alone. We will continue to update our website at www.thevaccinators.co.uk as well as our social media channels with the latest information as we continue to add more appointments.

Why can't I find a site near me to book my booster?

The National Booking Service automatically offers appointments that are available at that moment in time by geographic radius. Therefore, if a local site is currently fully booked people will be offered alternative locations. We recommend people check back regularly to see what other appointments have been uploaded if they're unable to travel to the sites offered. New appointments are being added all the time.

Why have you stopped walk-in booster clinics?

We made the decision to pause our walk-in clinics last week in advance of the Prime Minister's latest announcement, and our focus must be on opening up more appointments that people can book locally to manage demand and ensure if people travel to a centre, they will get their booster vaccination without queuing for prolonged periods of time.

How can people who are currently eligible get their booster in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough?

People who are currently eligible to get their booster – everyone aged 18 and over and those who are 16 and over and in an at-risk group - can pre-book their vaccination after at least 2 months, or 61 days, have passed since their last COVID-19 vaccination. Appointments can be booked online via www.nhs.uk/covidvaccine or by calling 119. Patients will be offered appointments after at least 3 months (91 days) have passed.

Currently we are not offering boosters on a walk-in basis. This is to ensure that as many eligible people as possible can access boosters in a planned and managed way.

What type of vaccine will we be offered as our booster?

In line with JCVI advice most patients will be offered an mRNA vaccination as their booster dose – this is the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine. Patients who are not able to have either of these vaccines for clinical reasons, for example due to allergies, will be offered AstraZeneca.

Patients can rest assured that they will be offered a booster vaccine that is safe and effective.

Why aren't GPs offering booster vaccinations?

Local GPs are already delivering booster vaccinations in our area, with many more stepping forward to run vaccination clinics over the coming days. We are incredibly grateful for their continued support in delivering vaccinations to local people.

What is being done to step up capacity?

We are pleased to say that all of our Primary Care Networks (PCNs) across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have agreed to be part of the delivery of booster doses over the next few weeks. Some practices will take part exclusively by offering boosters to their housebound patients, but a number of Primary Care Networks – groups of practices – will re-open their GP-led vaccination hub to deliver boosters to eligible patients across their patient lists.

In addition to the increase in participation in the programme from our fantastic primary care teams, all three acute hospital trusts in our area will be standing up a total of four COVID-19 booster vaccination hubs over the coming days. Hubs will be located at Royal Papworth Hospital and Addenbrooke's Hospital in Cambridge, as well as Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and Peterborough City Hospital.

Further to this, we are also working closely with Cambridgeshire Community Services (CCS) NHS Trust, who run the large scale vaccination centres in our area. We will be extending opening hours at existing large scale sites to allow for more bookable appointments to be made available, and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Foundation Trust (CPFT) continue to deliver vaccinations to housebound patients.

How will housebound patients get the vaccine?

Housebound booster vaccinations in our area are currently ongoing and are our priority area of focus. We have written to all housebound patients in our area and we have teams making phone calls to patients every day to offer appointments within their home.

Where can I go if I want to volunteer or apply for a job in the vaccination programme?

Whilst we are incredibly grateful to our fantastic teams who are already offering thousands of vaccinations every day, we would always welcome more volunteers and vaccinators.

We continue to recruit both paid and volunteer staff to support the biggest and fastest vaccination programme in the history of the NHS. We would encourage constituents who are interested in volunteering to visit www.nhsvolunteerresponders.org.uk. Paid roles within our vaccination centres can be found via www.jobs.nhs.uk.

I've heard some services are being paused because of the vaccination programme. Is that true?

The NHS has declared a Level 4 National Incident in recognition of the impact on the NHS both of supporting the very significant increase in the booster vaccination programme and the potentially significant rise in COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant.

NHS organisations across the country have now been instructed to take a number of actions, with a focus on enabling the vaccination programme to operate at full capacity whilst safeguarding urgent care for patients who need it.

In practical terms for patients the Level 4 national Incident means that some routine, nonemergency services will temporarily need to be paused or scaled down. We know that this will be very difficult to hear particularly for those patients who may have already been waiting for some time for their appointment. We will review the position regularly and will only cancel or postpone appointments where it is clinically safe to do so.

We want to remind patients that urgent services will continue to be available as normal. This means they will still be seen if they have symptoms that could be a sign of cancer; if they need emergency treatment for head injuries or fractures; if they suffer a stroke or heart attack and if they are currently receiving chemotherapy, to name some examples. If patients have an appointment booked with a local NHS service over the coming weeks, we would ask them to please still plan to attend this – if we need to postpone, we will contact the patient.

After my first and second vaccination dose I was told I needed to wait for 15 minutes before I could leave, but I've heard this is now no longer the case. Why is this?

Up until now, people receiving the Moderna or Pfizer vaccines had been asked to wait for 15 minutes before leaving the vaccination centre. This was in the unlikely event they had a serious reaction to the vaccine.

Research has found it's very rare to have a serious allergic reaction to the vaccine. If this does happen, it usually happens within minutes.

Due to the Omicron variant, the booster programme for adults is being accelerated. As part of this, and given the very low rate of anaphylaxis, the 15-minute wait has been suspended. People are not normally observed for 15 minutes after other vaccinations.

If you have a history of allergies, particularly to other vaccines, or if you had an immediate reaction after your previous doses, you may be advised to stay for the 15 minutes. Please make sure you tell the vaccination centre. Please also tell the centre if you have previously fainted following vaccination.

You must not drive for 15 minutes after the vaccine – this is because of the risk of fainting.