

Briefing: COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedure: Booster Vaccination and unpaid carers (ENGLAND ONLY) – 7 October 2021

Background to the briefing

Carers were included in the Joint Committee on Vaccination Immunisation (JCVI) advice to Government on 30 December 2020 within Priority 6 of the COVID-19 vaccine priority list. Carers are also in the priority list for the booster vaccination.

NOTE: This briefing is England only.

What has Carers UK been doing?

Carers UK has been working with NHS England and the Government to ensure that that unpaid carers are included in the COVID-19 vaccine programme in the right places at the right times. We have worked with NHSE and Government on providing clear and targeted communications to improve take-up amongst carers. Our members have worked with us, and with NHSE and Government, using their voices and experiences to encourage others to take up the vaccination.

We have worked with Government on all versions of the Standard Operating Procedure and have raised operational issues as well as experiences from carers to aid good policy making, as well as helping the system to work as well as it can. We've also worked with local systems to share good practice and to explore leaving a positive legacy.

Updated Standard Operating Procedure (07/10/21) is now published with booster information

The Standard Operating Procedure for Unpaid Carers (SOP) sets out the definition of which unpaid carers are eligible, processes of identification and interpretation.

The new version released on 07 October 2021 replaces the SOP published on 08 March 2021 and includes operational guidance for phase 3 delivery. Changes made since the SOP was first published are highlighted in yellow.

You can download the updated SOP here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/sop-covid-19-vaccine-deployment-programme-unpaid-carers-jcvi-priority-cohort-6/>

What is Phase 3 and booster roll out?

“Phase 3 is when COVID-19 vaccination booster doses should be given to Cohorts 1-9, as set out in the [JCVI statement](#) on 14 September 2021.

“In this Phase, unpaid carers including adults aged 50 years and over, and adults aged 16-49 who are in an influenza or COVID-19 at risk group will be offered a ‘booster’ vaccine no earlier than 6 months after their second dose, to enhance vaccine protection against COVID-19.

“JCVI advises that the booster programme should be deployed in the same order as during Phase 1 (priority groups 1-9), with operational flexibility exercised where appropriate to maximise delivery.”

What is the definition of carers that is being used?

The definition remains the same which is: *“Those who are eligible for a carer’s allowance, or those who are the sole or primary carer of an elderly or disabled person who is at increased risk of COVID-19 mortality and therefore clinically vulnerable.”* (see definition in the updated SOP).

Carers UK estimated that up to one third of all carers were vaccinated before Priority 6 due to age, working in health or care or because they were Clinically Extremely Vulnerable. There are early suggestions that this estimate was roughly right.

The paper states that 60% of carers are eligible under other cohorts.

What are the key steps?

“Unpaid carers who are identified as being in receipt of or entitled to a Carer’s Allowance for Phase 3, and those previously identified in Phase 1 as actively receiving support from the Local Authority or a carers organisation, will be called by the NHS Call and Recall service for booster vaccinations.”

“In line with new NHS guidance for planning and service delivery, locally held data submitted by Local Authorities and their partner carers’ organisations in Phase 1 can also be refreshed locally to send invitations to newly identified carers. This will allow Local Authorities to undertake local analysis on uptake including monitoring for equality of access and impact on health inequalities.”

This basically means that if the local areas decide not to refresh their lists because of capacity, the lists from March will be used.

“Those known to GPs who have a ‘carer’s flag’ on their primary care record will continued to be called as part of the ‘GP at risk’ group from cohort 6. Unpaid carers will be eligible to book their booster vaccination no earlier than 6 months after completion of the primary vaccine course, in line with the JCVI statement.”

Carers UK’s view and evidence:

If possible, we could encourage local organisations to refresh lists where they have capacity. Given that it has been seven months (mid-March to mid-October) since the original lists were generated, **Carers UK estimates that roughly 19% of the potential eligible group of carers will be new to caring. This means that if there was around**

50,000 eligible carers in a local area, around 9,500 would be new to caring since March 2021.

Since local areas have continued to encourage carers to register with GPs, etc. and have continued identification programmes, it's likely that a number of new carers are already within the system or known to local systems.

What about carers who are new and not identified?

"New unpaid carers should make themselves known to GP practices and Local Authority Carers Teams. They can request GP practices to record this on their primary care record. This is repeated several times in the guidance."

The guidance also includes a reference to the NICE guidance on adult carers – demonstrating to GP practices that they should be identifying carers.

Carers UK's view:

We welcome this guidance and approach nationally. If local areas agree with the local carers' organisation that they will work on behalf of local authorities, then communications locally should be clear about this. We would welcome continued communication to help identify new carers.

This is important since carers aged 16 to 49 would not be eligible for the booster, unless they were in another priority group 1-9.

If carers are identified through local authorities and through DWP records, can't they just be flagged on their GP record automatically

No, unfortunately this has not been possible. There are some local systems which have set up permissions to allow sharing of data e.g. Liverpool.

The guidance recognises that this is still a highly valuable opportunity to identify carers on their own patient record and suggests the following:

"Unpaid carers who have been identified through national data collections and who do not have a 'carer's flag' on their primary care record will be encouraged to make themselves known to GP practices as this provides a sustainable approach for identifying unpaid carers for any future vaccinations."

Where GP teams and Local Authorities receive new enquiries from unpaid carers requesting the COVID-19 vaccination, they should continue to apply their normal process for identifying their eligibility based on NICE guidance or the statutory carers assessment. If they have not completed their primary course of the COVID-19 vaccination, they should be directed to the National Booking Service."

What should take-up campaigns around carers focus on?

Carers UK's view is that take-up campaigns still very valuable and need to focus on continuing to ensure that:

- Carers who have not yet taken up the offer of a vaccination but have been invited to do so – and to find out what would make this possible/easier
- Carers take up their second dose and equally what barriers there are for take-up.

Carers UK's State of Caring survey, which will be published later in the year, shows that a small percentage of eligible carers have not had the vaccination but are warmer to having it either:

- a) Because they have not found the opportunity to do so
- b) Are concerned about having it, but are warmer to having it

We would encourage a particular focus on harder to reach groups to encourage take-up eg. Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic carers in particular as we know that there are lower take-up rates amongst these groups. Other lower rates have tended to be in areas of higher deprivation – which may be affecting carers in receipt of Carer's Allowance.

Take up campaigns should also focus on those who are new to caring – because if they do not fall into the Priority Groups 1-9 they will not necessarily receive a booster. The JCVI issues guidance on different topics at different intervals, but at the moment, Priority Groups 1-9 are the only ones that are being focussed on.

We would like to see new carers to identify themselves as a carer and get flagged as a carer on their GP patient record.

If local systems are able to set up robust permissions mechanisms to allow information to be shared with the GP practice if the carer gives permission to be flagged, this would leave a strong local legacy. This would have a higher effectiveness rate rather than asking the carer to do it themselves, but this obviously involves more resources for local organisations. It does demonstrate good well integrated and joined up care.

When are carers likely to have their boosters?

It is all dependent on being six months after the second dose (unless there is a third dose administered if the carer is immuno-suppressed).

As an example, if a carer received their vaccination mid-Feb, their second mid-May, their booster would be around mid-November.

Similarly, if a carer had their first vaccination at the end of March, their second at the end of June, they would have their booster at the end of December.

How does this fit with flu immunisation?

Carers are also eligible for a free flu jab. The advice is to have this when it's available rather than waiting for the COVID-19 booster. <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/flu-jabs>

Carers UK's information for carers on flu jabs can be found here:

<https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/flu-jabs>

What will Carers UK be doing next?

- Updating our information, advice and guidance for carers and will be posting information here: www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-vaccine-faqs
- Responding to carers' queries about the booster vaccination – this is the key issue through our advice services currently.
- Working with Government to get delivery of the vaccination right for carers.
- Providing regular updates as the situation unfolds.

About Carers UK

Carers UK is the leading charity representing the millions of people who provide unpaid care for ill, older, or disabled family members, or friends. We provide advice, information and support as well as providing insights into carer's experience.

Contact us

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