

COVID-19 Standard Operating Procedure: Vaccination and unpaid carers (ENGLAND ONLY) – updated on 01 April 2021

Vaccination against COVID-19: an update regarding unpaid carers

Carers were included in the Joint Committee on Vaccination Immunisation (JCVI) advice to Government on 30 December 2020, clarifying their inclusion in Priority 6 of the COVID-19 vaccine priority list.

Since Monday 15th February, unpaid carers have been included in the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccine in England

NOTE: This briefing is [England only](#).

What has Carers UK been doing?

Carers UK have been working to ensure that the NHS England and the Government clearly communicates that unpaid carers are included in priority group 6 in all their communications. We have been responding to carers' queries about the vaccine and have been monitoring practice around take-up of vaccines and procedures.

We continue to work with NHS England and Government on providing clear and targeted communications about the inclusion of unpaid carers in priority group 6. We have also been working with Government about the Standard Operational Procedure for the roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination to unpaid carers.

From 1 April –

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Standard Operating Procedure for unpaid carers sets out more detail of process and definition

The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Unpaid Carers sets out the definition of which unpaid carers are eligible, processes of identification and interpretation. The only area in the SOP which is different, is the route for unknown eligible carers to self-refer. Please see the section on “unknown” carers below.

The SOP can be found here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/sop-covid-19-vaccine-deployment-programme-unpaid-carers-icvi-priority-cohort-6/>

What the Government has said about roll-out so far:

Following the Government announcement regarding Priority 6 group vaccinations beginning, NHS England wrote to GPs regarding identifying people within the Priority 6 cohort including unpaid carers. You can read the letter here (see Annex B):

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2021/02/C1124-vaccination-cohorts-5-6-additional-funding-residential-settings.pdf>

In Annex B, the letter states that:

“Eligible adult carers will be contacted via the National Booking System (NBS) to receive an invitation to book vaccination through Vaccination Centres, Community Pharmacy LVSs or Hospital Hubs, once a list compiled by NHSE/I in conjunction with Local Authorities has been produced.

Local systems may choose to flex these arrangements based on the needs of their populations and PCN LVSs should be prepared to administer vaccination to eligible adult carers who choose to receive vaccination in LVS settings, and are coded as such on the GP system.

Local systems including both the NHS and Local Authorities should continue to collaborate to ensure that individuals within cohort 6 who are resident in settings of multiple occupancy or are adult carers not flagged within GP systems can be appropriately offered vaccination.

Further guidance relating to the vaccination of eligible adult carers will be published as a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) week commencing 15/02/21. This SOP will detail the specific actions that will be required by Local Authorities, carers organisations, DWP, the NHS and adult carers themselves.

We recognise the difficulties in identifying people in this group. We are asking the third sector to help us identify people through public campaigns, with an ‘ask’ that eligible unpaid carers contact their local authority to make themselves known so they can be prioritised for vaccination through the National Booking Service.

PCN LVSs should also prioritise invitations to carers aged 16 and 17 flagged within their systems to align with their known allocations of Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is the only currently authorised vaccine under Regulation 174 which can be used for individuals aged 16 and 17.

PCN LVSs should coordinate the offer of vaccination to carers flagged in their systems so that the carer and the at-risk individual they care for can be vaccinated at the same time if both individuals are registered within a practice in that PCN.

When administering vaccinations to at risk individuals who are housebound, the PCN LVS should, where it is clinically appropriate to do so, vaccinate both the at-risk individual and their main carer (if present) at the same time.”

NB: JCVI definition changed on 12 Feb 2021

The Green Book contains the advice from the Joint Committee on Immunisation and Vaccination (JCVI) to Government. It republishes it's advice and keeps it updated. The new definitions is as [follows](#) on p. 10/11:

‘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 note).’

In a note it adds:

‘Those clinically vulnerable to COVID include children with severe neuro-disabilities, those who are designated Clinically Extremely vulnerable (CEV), adults who have underlying health conditions (as defined in table 3), and those who need care because of advanced age. Eligible carers should be vaccinated in priority group 6.’

The GP communication and the Standard Operating Procedure makes it clear that younger carers aged 16 to 17 are covered, which we have welcomed. The SOP sets out different arrangements for vaccination of young carers aged 16 and 17.

Carers UK estimates that up to one third of all carers will have been vaccinated already due to age, working in health or care, or because they are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable or have an underlying condition that puts them in cohort six.

Key definitions and interpretations in the Standard Operating Procedure

There are a number of key definitions and interpretations in the SOP these include:

- Primary carer – in some situations where there are more than one unpaid carer providing regular care more than one unpaid carer will be eligible. The SOP states: *“Two siblings who equally share and provide 24-hour care to an older person with dementia in addition to their own family and work commitments. If either sibling was to fall ill, the other would not be able to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the older person. Both siblings would be considered the primary carer”.*
- The carer does not need to live with the person needs to be cared for.
- Although the examples don't give an illustration of mental illness, if the person receiving care has severe mental illness and is a priority for that reason, the carer would be eligible if they were providing personal care or face-to-face support for example.

- Advanced age – note, the term ‘advanced age’ is not qualified in the SOP although the example suggests that it would include a carer of someone who was part of any of the cohorts 1 to 6.

What steps have happened so far from the Standard Operating Procedure?

The roll out is taking place through a phased process.

What has happened so far?

- Carers who are in receipt of or eligible for Carer’s Allowance have been directly contacted and are now able to book directly through the National Booking System. Carers UK has warmly welcomed this move and the fact that the Department for Work and Pensions used this definition. This type of action is unprecedented and positive.
- Carers in receipt of Carer Element for Universal Credit have also been called for their vaccination. Carers UK has welcomed the work of the Department of Work and Pensions to include these carers.
- Carers who were flagged on their local GP patient record have been contacted by their local Primary Care Network/GP practice. If carers have not been contacted this way, they should check what is happening with their GP practice.
- The process includes all lists being deduplicated which reduces the likelihood of someone being offered an appointment twice.
- The current guidance to GP practices, CCGs, and PCNs also suggests that if carers accompany someone (who is in any of the Priority Groups) to an appointment, then they should be vaccinated at the same time.
- The current guidance on vaccinating housebound patients also recommends vaccinating eligible carers at the same time. Both of these points are reiterated in the SOP.

What about local authorities’ data? How has that worked?

Local authorities have submitted data nationally on eligible carers so that carers can be invited for vaccination. Carers started to be contacted through this route from 15 March 2021.

In terms of process, local authorities worked with local carers’ organisations to identify eligible carers on their lists, where those local carers’ organisations have data sharing agreements or are able to share carers’ contacts with the local authorities.

The SOP sets out that this should have included carers who have had carers’ assessments and are being actively supported by local carers’ organisations. Carers UK would like to see open and broad interpretation in that that is would include joint assessments, where carers have refused assessments, or where the outcome of the assessment includes information and advice.

Many local areas have been working collaboratively for some time. Some local carers' organisations have data sharing agreements, but not all. Some have sought consent from carers to pass on details.

What if carers were not on these lists? What if they are not known to the “system”.

The Government has recognised that there are many carers unknown to the system and opened up a new route for unpaid carers to self-refer.

Until 1 April, eligible carers who had not already received an invitation to come to the vaccine were able to book via the National Booking System. Carers without internet access or who had questions were asked to ring 119.

This is for carers aged 18 and above. Young carers can only have the Pfizer vaccine and should be contacting their local GP practice to be registered to receive the vaccine, if eligible. The same eligibility criteria apply to 16 and 17 year olds as they do adults. This continues to be the same process.

New process from 1 April 2021 – self-referral route for eligible carers is now via GP practices

Since 1 April, due to the vaccine supply profile in England in April, carers who are eligible, but who have not been invited to come forward for the vaccine, have to register with their GP practice. A letter from NHS England to the system states that Primary Care Networks need to have measures in place to ensure that eligible carers are recorded on primary care systems and invited for the vaccine. See here:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/vaccination-of-adult-household-contacts-of-severely-immunosuppressed-individuals-alongside-jcvi-priority-cohort-6-and-completion-of-cohorts-1-9/>

Carers UK has developed a template letter for carers to send to their GP practices to get registered and especially if they are turned away when it looks like they are eligible. See here: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health/looking-after-your-health/register-as-an-unpaid-carer-with-your-gp-template-letter>

New route for carers to be vaccinated (updated 01/04/21):

The link above to the letter to GP practices and Primary Care Networks, also shows the new policy of ensuring that the household is vaccinated where there is a person who has been classified as immuno-suppressed. The guidance now suggests that they should also be vaccinated. This would include carers and it is possible that younger carers, under 50, will have access through this route.

Carers being asked for proof of being a carer – Local Vaccination Centres

Carers UK has heard from carers and others that they are being asked for proof of being a carer at local Vaccination Centres. According to the SOP and the process, proof is not required. This is highly problematic as carers have been told via the National Booking System that they don't need proof. Obviously it puts the carer in a very difficult position. Carers UK has raised this with the NHS who are leading the vaccination roll-out

programme as we are concerned that carers are being unnecessarily refused the vaccine. We would like to hear of anonymous examples of proof being asked for and at which vaccination centres.

Publicity, encouraging take-up:

Carers UK is part of a Charities Coalition to encourage people to have the vaccine if they are offered it. This work started on Saturday 27 February - see [here](#). We will continue to working with DHSC regarding vaccine take-up.

We have also encouraged a targeted campaign for unpaid carers, similar to that of the flu jab run by Public Health England – e.g. 2020 flu campaign and based on the materials for health and care workers for the COVID-19 vaccine.

We are concerned about vaccine hesitancy (i.e. people who are reluctant to have the vaccine) in some communities, particularly BAME communities and how this will affect carers. Given the additional challenges in identifying carers in BAME communities, we believe that there needs to be additional focus on making sure these carers have the best accurate information possible, ideally led by community voices.

We will publish information with links to supportive information.

Carers UK has also updated our [Frequently Asked Questions](#) – these are up to date as of 01/04/21.

What about local work to continue to identify carers?

Some local areas have agreements with their local Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) and Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and are identifying carers locally and inviting them for vaccination.

NHS website and information clarity:

The NHS website is now up to date with the correct eligibility criteria.

For a few weeks, there was an incorrect eligibility definition on the NHS website saying that only carers eligible for Carer's Allowance were eligible. We know from carers that they have been turned away by GP practices as a result of the wrong definition being given out. Carers UK raised the problem with NHS England and it was updated. The updated link is here: <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/>

It is possible that there is still confusion about the eligibility criteria within the NHS system.

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 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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Disclaimer: While every effort has been made to ensure that this briefing is accurate, it is not an authoritative statement of the law. Please note that there will be periodic updates as new information is released. Please ensure that you have the most up to date version.

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