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NADHIM ZAHAWI REVEALS VACCINATIONS WILL BE OFFERED TO CHILDREN AGED 12 AND OVER WHO ARE VULNERABLE, OR LIVE WITH SOMEONE WHO IS

Pfizer jab to be offered to vulnerable children under 17 'at greatest risk' of coronavirus. The list includes those with severe neurodisabilities, Down's syndrome, a suppressed immune system or severe learning disabilities. Nadhim Zahawi reveals vaccinations will be offered to children aged 12 and over who are vulnerable, or live with someone who is. Young British children who are deemed vulnerable to coronavirus will be given the vaccination offered to adults - with their parents' consent. The first vaccinations of younger children against Covid-19 will take place on Tuesday after the government confirmed the measures. Those children aged 12 to 15 deemed to be at increased risk of serious illness will get the Pfizer jab if they and their parents consent. That includes those with severe neurodisabilities, Down's syndrome, a suppressed immune system or severe learning disabilities. Any 12 to 17 year olds who live with a family member who is immunosuppressed will also be offered a jab.

Children aged 16 or 17 with such conditions already qualified under the existing rollout, reports MirrorOnline. Those who are turning 18 in less than three months will also be offered the jab immediately, so those who are youngest in their school year have been vaccinated by the time they enter the workforce or start university. The decision was advised by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) which has decided not to expand vaccinations to otherwise well under-18s due to concerns about a tiny number of cases of heart inflammation in children. According to MirrorOnline, sources say this will be reviewed "over the next few weeks". The announcement comes after the government confirmed all over-18s have now been offered a first dose of the vaccine, with five days to spare. Wales' Health Minister Eluned Morgan said: "Following months of discussion and consideration of evidence, the JCVI recommends that children and young people aged 12 -15 years with specific underlying health conditions that put them at risk of serious Covid-19 should be offered a Covid-19 vaccination. Essentially the clinically extremely vulnerable patient group now includes young people aged 12 and over. The NHS will work quickly to identify these young people and to offer them the vaccine.

"Young people aged 16 to 17 years of age who are at higher risk of serious Covid-19, as currently set out in the Green Book, have already been offered the Covid-19 vaccination and should continue to be offered. "Children and young people aged 12 years and over who are household contacts of persons who are immunosuppressed should be offered a Covid-19 vaccination on the understanding that the main benefits from vaccination are related to the potential for indirect protection of their household contact who is immunosuppressed.

"JCVI also advises that operationally, it is reasonable to allow a lead-in time to offer vaccination to those children who are within three months of their 18th birthday to ensure good uptake of vaccine in newly-turned 18 year olds. We will move quickly to vaccinate those turning 18 years old, including those intending to go to university.

"As a result of the low incidence and severity of Covid-19 in children and the reported safety issues, the JCVI does not currently advise routine universal vaccination of all other children and young people less than 18 years of age. I am aware there have been calls for children to be vaccinated to prevent them getting post-acute Covid-19 syndrome (long covid). Covid rates in children are relatively low and there is still limited information about the overall direct effects of the virus on them. However, studies are emerging which show that this risk is very low in children, especially in comparison with adults, and similar to the secondary health complications of other respiratory viral infections in children."

UK Health Secretary Sajid Javid said: "Today's advice from the independent JCVI means more vulnerable young people at greatest risk from this virus can now benefit from Covid-19 vaccines. "I have accepted their expert recommendations and I have asked the NHS to prepare to vaccinate those eligible as soon as possible. "Young people aged 12 to 15 with severe neuro-disabilities, Down's Syndrome, immunosuppression and multiple or severe learning disabilities, as well as people who are household contacts of individuals who are immunosuppressed, will be eligible for vaccination soon. "Our independent medicines regulator, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, has approved the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for people aged 12 and over as it meets their robust standards of safety, effectiveness and quality.

Mr Javid added: "Today's advice does not recommend vaccinating under-18s without underlying health conditions at this point in time. "But the JCVI will continue to review new data, and consider whether to recommend vaccinating under-18s without underlying health conditions at a future date. "I encourage everybody who is eligible to get their jabs as soon as they can." The rest of the 12-to-17 age group may still be offered the Covid vaccine later this year, once more clinical trials in to its safety are completed. Herd immunity against the virus cannot be reached in Britain without vaccinating children. Vaccines Minister Nadhim Zahawi told MPs a booster programme will go ahead because "we do not know how long immunity lasts".

He also warned the uptake of vaccines among over-30s so far was "much lower" than other age groups and "needs to increase". A consent system is still being finalised but both children and parents may have to consent for the jab to go ahead. Data from trials and countries such as the US, where children are already being jabbed, indicate one in every 20,000 children experience myocarditis after a Covid jab. This sees the heart muscle become inflamed. It can enlarge and weaken the heart, create scar tissue and force the heart to work harder to circulate blood and oxygen around the body. More cases of myocarditis have been seen in younger children who have the lowest risk from Covid-19. Currently the JCVI does not have enough data to show the risk from Covid is greater for children than the risk of this little-understood complication. Fewer than 30 children in the UK have died after developing Covid-19 and analysis shows most, if not all, had underlying health conditions. Professor Anthony Harnden, Deputy Chair of the JCVI, said: "The primary aim of the vaccination programme has always been to prevent hospitalisations and deaths. "Based on the fact that previously well children, if they do get Covid-19, are likely to have a very mild form of the disease, the health benefits of vaccinating them are small. "The benefits of reducing transmission to the wider population from children are also highly uncertain, especially as vaccine uptake is very high in older people who are at highest risk from serious Covid-19 infection. "We will keep this advice under review as more safety and effectiveness information becomes available." The Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency (MHRA) approved the Pfizer jab for 12 to 15-year-olds in June, following early trial results in teenagers. There is still no data for younger children. Pfizer is expected to release results on trials for five to 11-year-olds in September and two to five-year-olds by November. AstraZeneca is also conducting trials in children aged six to 17 with results expected before the end of the year.