



WEEKLY NEWSLETTER – 20th April 2021

EXTRAORDINARY COVID-19 UPDATE

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1. Vaccinating patients aged over 45

Last week, as lockdown restrictions began to ease in varying ways across the UK, those aged 45 and over in England are now eligible to book an appointment via the [NHS national booking service](#) to receive the COVID-19 vaccination. Practice groups can now invite these patients for their first vaccination if they have sufficient supplies alongside continuing with second vaccinations to those patients who are due to receive it.

This follows a statement published by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) on [phase 2 of the COVID-19 vaccination programme](#), which recommends that the most effective way to minimise hospitalisations and deaths is to continue to prioritise people by age.

2. Extension to existing ES service specification

GPC England and NHSE/I have agreed an extension to the existing enhanced service specification for practice sites to administer vaccinations to patients between the age of 18 and 50. The service specification arrangements for this second phase of the programme will mirror the arrangements for the first phase, and sites will still get the £12.58 item of service fee for each vaccine administered. Read more about the next phase of the vaccination programme [here](#).

JCVI have also advised that individuals aged 18 to 49 years, in particular males in certain black, Asian, or ethnic minority (BAME) communities, those with a BMI of 30 or more (obese/morbidly obese), and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation, should take up the offer of vaccination, as data has indicated that there is an increased risk of hospitalisation for this group.

3. Moderna vaccine

The [Moderna vaccine](#) has begun to be delivered across more than 20 vaccination sites in England, following use in Scotland and Wales, for those aged 18-29 who are eligible, providing another alternative to the AstraZeneca vaccine in line with updated [MHRA guidance](#) last week.



4. Vaccinating during Ramadan

NHSE/I has published guidance on supporting [COVID-19 vaccine uptake during the Islamic month of Ramadan](#) which began on Monday 12 April 2021. The guidance aims to help vaccination sites build confidence, reduce barriers to access and support the uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine amongst Muslim communities during the month of Ramadan.

5. PRINCIPLE trial on COVID treatment

Following the publication of findings from the Oxford-led [PRINCIPLE trial](#) on inhaled budesonide as a potential COVID treatment, NHSE/I has issued the following [advice](#) which states:

Inhaled budesonide is **not** currently being recommended as standard of care but can be considered (off-label) on a case-by-case basis for symptomatic COVID-19 positive patients, aged 65 and over OR those aged 50 or over with co-morbidities, in line with the published [Interim Position Statement](#). This Interim Position Statement clarifies that this includes co-morbidities that are 'consistent with a long-term health condition from the flu list'.

What is the background to this new Therapeutic Alert?

The PRINCIPLE trial [reported](#) a 3-day median benefit in self-reported recovery for patients with COVID-19 in the community setting who received inhaled budesonide. The impact on hospitalisation rates or mortality has not been established, but the evaluation is ongoing, so recommendations may change as more data become available. The current Therapeutic Alert is based on a decision by the Chief Medical Officer after consideration of the evidence.

What does this mean in practical terms?

There is no expectation that inhaled budesonide will be routinely prescribed for patients in the eligible cohorts with COVID-19. Advice to patients on the management of COVID-19 has not changed. However, as stated in the Therapeutic alert, prescribers may consider prescribing it to reduce symptoms in eligible cohorts who are being managed in the community. This would be on a case-by-case basis using a shared decision-making approach.

Where a decision is made to prescribe, prescribers are asked to ensure that the patient understands how to use the inhaler properly. As patients will be self-isolating, this may be via video link (see below).

Patients will need to ask a friend or relative to collect the inhaler. If this is not possible, they can access the [NHS Volunteer Responders](#) service. They will also be eligible for free delivery if other routes are not possible.

For pharmacists and dispensing doctors

Additional supplies of the Pulmicort 400 Turbohaler (AstraZeneca UK Ltd) are now available to be ordered as needed through business-as-usual routes from wholesalers.

Information for patients

Information for patients can be found [here](#), including a link to videos explaining correct inhaler technique from Asthma UK.



6. COVID-19 vaccine animations launched to help tackle disinformation

NHS England and NHS Improvement has launched a series of animations aimed at tackling disinformation about the COVID-19 vaccine. Aimed specifically at encouraging uptake in ethnic minority groups, the animations are available in 17 different languages and are suitable for use on a wide range of social media platforms. They cover key topics including vaccine safety, how it was tested, how it was developed so quickly, what is in it, and what the side effects are. Original files can be downloaded from the campaign resource centre in the form of [short clips](#) and also a [longer video](#), and the English versions are available on [YouTube](#).

7. Weekly COVID-19 data update

The BMA's Health Policy team has started producing a weekly summary of key data on various aspects of the pandemic (Enc.1). The data is from external published sources (with links to the relevant data/study)

Please note that the LMC are unable to accept calls or hold communications with patients, we are GP representatives, and we would respectfully ask that Practices do not advise patients to contact us. Could we also remind Practices that any copies of patient related correspondence MUST be anonymised as the LMC can not accept patient identifiable data.

Please note our office contact times remain 10:00-16:00 and any queries on the day should be directed to birmingham.lmc@nhs.net as we are currently remote working so would be grateful if all contact were made via the nhs.net email.

Helpful Links:

BMA COVID-19: toolkit for GPs and GP practices <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/gp-practices/covid-19-toolkit-for-gps-and-gp-practices> Comprehensive guidance for GPs, partners, and practice managers to manage employment and contractual issues and service provision during the coronavirus pandemic.

GOVERNMENT WEBSITE: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> for recent and upcoming changes, guidance & support.

NHS ENGLAND: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/implementing-phase-3-of-the-nhs-response-to-the-covid-19-pandemic/>