

Briefing for the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee on petition [PE1899](#): Conduct a risk benefit analysis prior to providing those under 16 with COVID-19 vaccination, lodged by Mary Henderson

Background

The Petition is calling for a risk-benefit analysis to be undertaken before the COVID-19 vaccination is offered to under 16s.

Ministers are guided on decisions about vaccines by the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). One of the roles of the JCVI is to consider the evidence around safety and efficacy and advise Ministers accordingly. This includes a review of the evidence around risks and benefits.

Ministers are not bound by the JCVI's recommendations, but have frequently stated that no Scottish Minister has gone against its advice.

Scottish Government Action

Since the petition was lodged, the COVID-19 vaccine was rolled out to under 16s with underlying health conditions or disabilities, and then to all 12-15 year olds.

Initially, [the JCVI did not recommend the vaccine for under 16s](#) concluding:

The margin of benefit, based primarily on a health perspective, is considered too small to support advice on a universal programme of vaccination of otherwise healthy 12 to 15-year-old children at this time. As longer-term data on potential adverse reactions accrue, greater

certainty may allow for a reconsideration of the benefits and harms. Such data may not be available for several months.

However, the indirect harms of COVID-19 are not within the remit of the JCVI and so, in responding to stakeholder concerns about educational impact, it recommended that these risks and benefits should be considered by others:

The government may wish to seek further views on the wider societal and educational impacts from the chief medical officers of the 4 nations.

The Chief Medical Officers of each of the four UK nations subsequently concluded that the additional benefits were sufficient to justify vaccination of children over the age of 12.

12-15 year olds are now being offered a single dose of the Pfizer vaccine.

Scottish Parliament Action

There has been no specific work undertaken on this topic by the Scottish Parliament, but it has been raised repeatedly during debates, parliamentary questions and committee evidence sessions.

Key Organisations and relevant links

[Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation](#) (JCVI)

Dr Gregor Smith – Chief Medical Officer for Scotland

[Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health](#)

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Senior Researcher
27 September 2021

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Published by the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe),
an office of the Scottish Parliamentary Corporate Body, The
Scottish Parliament, Edinburgh, EH99 1SP