

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 17 April 2024
6th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6)

PE2072: Offer covid 19 vaccine boosters to teachers and school staff

Introduction

Petitioner Peter Barlow

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to offer covid-19 vaccine boosters to teachers and school staff.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2072>

1. This is a new petition that was lodged on 6 December 2023.
2. A full summary of this petition and its aims can be found at **Annexe A**.
3. A SPICe briefing has been prepared to inform the Committee's consideration of the petition and can be found at **Annexe B**.
4. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 240 signatures have been received on this petition.
5. The Committee seeks views from the Scottish Government on all new petitions before they are formally considered.
6. The Committee has received written submissions from the Scottish Government and the Petitioner which are set out at **Annexe C** of this paper.
7. [The Joint Committee on Vaccination Immunisation \(JCVI\) published its statement on COVID-19 vaccination in spring 2024 and considerations on future vaccination on 7 February 2024.](#)

Action

8. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
April 2024

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2072: Offer covid-19 vaccine boosters to teachers and school staff

Petitioner

Peter Barlow

Date Lodged

6 December 2023

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to offer covid-19 vaccine boosters to teachers and school staff.

Previous action

Emails to MSPs and social media groups.

Background information

I'm starting this petition as a retired teacher who worked for the Scottish NHS as a Contact Tracing Practitioner until January this year. This experience gave me insight into how many people - teachers, children and other family members - were catching Covid at or from school. It's a no-brainer to focus on reducing transmission in schools. This measure will also reduce costs to schools for supply staff covering for sick colleagues, as well as protecting teachers from the consequences of both Acute and long-covid. Too many of my former colleagues have struggled to overcome Long Covid; many have had to leave teaching.

Children and staff deserve protection. Vaccination is one added layer of protection, using "Dr Reason's Swiss Cheese Model".

Our strategy for living with covid-19 must change so fewer people end up disabled or dying from it.

Annexe B: SPICe briefing on petition PE2072



Background

The Scottish Government policy on COVID-19 vaccination is set out in a [letter from the Chief Medical Officer](#) which was published on 9 September 2023.

This letter details eligibility for the 2023 programme of winter vaccinations for both influenza and COVID-19. The objectives of the programme are set out as:

1. To protect those in society who continue to be more at-risk of severe COVID-19 and flu.
2. To increase immunity in those at higher risk of severe COVID-19 and flu during winter 2023, to prevent severe illness, hospitalisation and death.
3. To focus on a co-administration model, offering flu and COVID-19 vaccinations at the same appointment where possible.

The letter is based on [advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation](#) (JCVI) and recommends a COVID-19 booster to the following groups:

- Residents and staff in care homes for older adults
- Those aged 65 years and over
- Those aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group, as defined in tables 3 and 4 of the COVID-19 chapter of [the Green Book](#)
- Frontline health and social care workers (HSCWs)
- Those aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts, as defined in [the Green Book](#), of people with immunosuppression
- Those aged 16 to 64 years who are carers, as defined in [the Green Book](#)
- Pregnant women

Therefore, unless a member of teaching or school staff falls into one of the above categories, they will not automatically be eligible for a COVID-19 vaccination.

The JCVI recently published its advice on the spring booster programme. It recommends that a vaccine should be offered to:

- adults aged 75 years and over
- residents in a care home for older adults
- individuals aged 6 months and over who are immunosuppressed (as defined in tables 3 or 4 in the [COVID-19 chapter of the Green Book](#))

At the time of writing, the Scottish Government has yet to respond to the advice.

Scottish Government Action

The Scottish Government has instructed NHS Boards to administer the vaccination programme in accordance with the advice from the JCVI and the Chief Medical Officer.

Scottish Parliament Action

The Scottish Parliament has not undertaken any work on the eligibility for COVID-19 vaccination.

Kathleen Robson
SPICe Research
27 January 2024

Annexe C: Written submissions

Scottish Government submission of 8 January 2023

PE2072/A: Offer covid-19 vaccine boosters to teachers and school staff

The Scottish Government's decision-making throughout all COVID-19 vaccination programmes has been guided by the independent, expert clinical advice of the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI)

The JCVI is an independent expert advisory committee that advises United Kingdom government health departments in the four UK nations on immunisations and the prevention of infectious disease. The JCVI has the responsibility to provide high quality and considered advice and recommendations to the UK Health Ministers following thorough risk and benefit analysis. They consider vaccine safety, efficacy and look at the impact and cost effectiveness of immunisation strategies.

On 8 August 2023 the JCVI issued [advice](#) that a COVID-19 winter vaccine should be offered to the following groups:

- residents in care homes for older adults
- all adults aged 65 years and over
- persons aged 6 months to 64 years in a clinical risk group, as defined in tables 3 and 4 of the [COVID-19 chapter of the Green book](#)
- frontline health and social care workers
- persons aged 12 to 64 years who are household contacts, as defined in the Green book, of people with immunosuppression
- persons aged 16 to 64 years who are carers, as defined in the Green book, and staff working in care homes for older adults

The primary aim of Scotland's COVID-19 vaccination programme continues to be the prevention of severe illness, hospitalisations and deaths arising from the virus, in those most vulnerable due to age and clinical condition. It is also the case that population immunity to COVID-19 continues to increase with many people having 'hybrid immunity' acquired through a combination of previous vaccination and recovery from natural infection.

We understand the concern around transmission of COVID-19 in school settings, but it is important to note that whilst available COVID-19 vaccines are highly effective at protecting vaccinated individuals from severe COVID-19 related disease and death for many months, protection against symptomatic infection alone is less durable and protection against transmission of infection from one person to another is limited.

In conclusion, at this time the JCVI have not advised that teachers and school staff be offered a winter vaccine and the Scottish Government continues to be guided by their advice on COVID-19 vaccine deployment. There are therefore no plans to make COVID-19 vaccination available to groups not covered by JCVI advice this winter.

Petitioner submission of 22 January 2024

PE2072/B: Offer covid 19 vaccine boosters to teachers and school staff

I had tried to word this petition so that it would not be unnecessarily complicated by party political or constitutional issues, however, the response from the Scottish Government doesn't leave much choice. And my comments here contain no new information as such, as *the inadequacy of the JCVI advice* (which the government response ignores) *is clearly implicit in the reason for the petition*: it is precisely because the JCVI advice has proved *inadequate to prevent transmission* in schools, as seen in recent surges (and the ensuing Long Covid cases) that we should be offering the latest vaccines to school staff (and college staff: I should have included them in the original wording as the transmission vectors are so similar). So the Scottish Government response here is perplexing and contradictory, and basically says "We're just doing what we're told, even though it's not working and has contributed to the issue being petitioned about."

As someone also commented on Twitter, which sums up my view clearly and strongly (I thought about rephrasing this in more "parliamentary" language, but this is pithy and to the point, so better to have the original wording...):

"@scotgov's response is what it always is on vaccination, namely 'we do whatever JCVI says'. But that's not good enough from a devolved pro-independence government with hard-won devolved powers on health. THEY, not JCVI, are answerable for @scotgov policy. On what evidence, via what process, @scotgov, did you decide JCVI's conclusions are right for the people of Scotland? How do you account for other equally eminent people/ bodies in other countries concluding differently to JCVI? We deserve more than cowardly buck passing..."