

Supporting people with a learning disability to access the COVID-19 vaccine



Advice for primary care staff, including GPs

Updated 8th March 2021

People with a learning disability are one of the most vulnerable groups to coronavirus.

Data shows that people with a learning disability died at 6 times the rate of the general population during the pandemic, with those aged 18-34 dying at a rate 33 times higher than the general population. 65% of those who died during the first wave had a mild or moderate learning disability.

Not only are people with a learning disability more likely to have long term conditions that put them at clinical risk from coronavirus, but they are also more likely to miss out on the healthcare they need should they become unwell. In 2019 people with a learning disability were 4 times more likely to die from a cause that we would expect to be treatable with good quality healthcare. In addition, people are much more likely to be living with other people, in group settings such as supported living or a care home.

We estimate that most people with a learning disability are already prioritised for the vaccine:

- People on the GP learning disability register are now all in Group 6, including those with mild/moderate learning disabilities

In addition:

- People with Down's syndrome are in Group 4
- Many of the other healthcare conditions that disproportionately affect people with a learning disability are in group 6 including epilepsy, diabetes, cerebral palsy etc.
- Many others live in residential care settings.

The JCVI have now recommended that Group 6 includes all those on the Learning Disability Register.

We know that many people with a learning disability are missing from the GP learning disability register. Please do everything you can to find them. We are encouraging people to check whether they are on the learning disability register if they do not receive an invitation for their annual health check every year.

We understand this is a very busy time but please ensure your practice staff are able to support people with a learning disability to sign up to the register.

This [useful guidance from NHS England](#) will help you to identify your patients with a learning disability. Remember, whether or not someone receiving social care support, or having an IQ score below 70 are not mandatory for entry to the learning disability register. Instead, you must use your judgement.

Top tips to ensure your patients with a learning disability can access the vaccine:

- Delivering the vaccine in a **familiar primary care setting** will help many who would simply not cope with a large scale vaccination centre. **Consider whether visits to care homes or supported living environments** would be beneficial for your patients, and for you!
- There are things you can do to **help people who struggle with anxiety**. Familiar staff, familiar settings and minimising waiting times can all make a huge difference. **Ask the person, their carers and supporters about how the person has been supported to access procedures like this before.**
- Encourage and enable the person and their supporters to do as much prep work as they can before the time comes to consent to the vaccine. **Provide accessible info, and encourage supporters and family carers to go through the information with the person beforehand.**
- Support those who are assessed as not having the capacity to decide about the vaccine for themselves – **ensure best interest decisions are made where needed, and ask for support on the MCA and best interest decision making where you need it. Involve the person’s family and supporters.**
- **Get to know the learning disability nurses in your area, and understand what help they can offer.** You may be lucky enough to have learning disability nurses working in your primary care network, or you could make contact with the health facilitation nurses in your local community learning disability team.
- **Communicate in a way the person can understand**, slowing down and explaining information clearly, and making sure any written information, or contact regarding the appointment is done in a way the person can understand.
- Do **follow up on any missed appointments** for people with a learning disability.
- **Signpost patients and their families and supporters to accessible resources** to help them understand more about the vaccine. Some useful links are:
 - Easy read resources from Mencap

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-help-stay-safe-and-well>

- A video explaining vaccines from NHS England

<https://youtu.be/M3Wh23PDnfE>

- Easy read information from Public Health England

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/951000/PHE_11843_Covid-19_Easy-read_leaflet.pdf

- Easy read from the Downs Syndrome Association

<https://www.downs-syndrome.org.uk/download-package/coronavirus-vaccine-easy-read/?highlight=vaccine>

You can also refer families to the Learning Disability Helpline from Mencap for more advice and support:

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/advice-and-support/our-services/learning-disability-helpline>