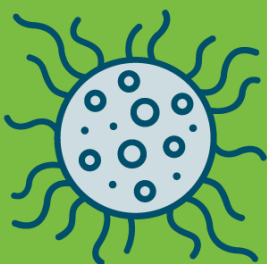


What are people telling us about COVID-19 booster vaccines?

Key messages from our evidence: November 2021



About

This briefing aims to update national health and social care stakeholders about the COVID-19 booster vaccine programme. It draws on:

- Information and advice the public are asking us about
- Experiences and attitudes people have shared with us

It focuses on people's questions, views, concerns and experiences of:

- Finding out when they might get the booster vaccination
- Booking an appointment for a booster vaccination
- Location of booster vaccine clinics
- Having the booster vaccine

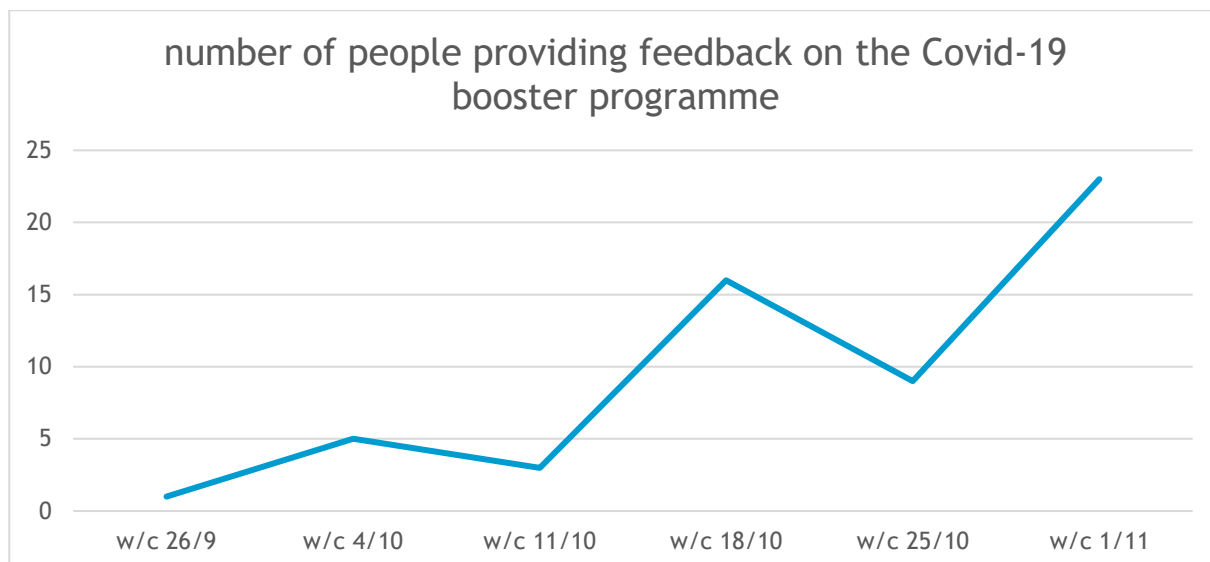
This update is informed by:

- The views of over 84 people in one local Healthwatch report;
- Data from 18 local Healthwatch services across England, providing the feedback of 60 individuals on the COVID-19 vaccine booster programme
- Two pieces of feedback from Healthwatch England's online feedback form

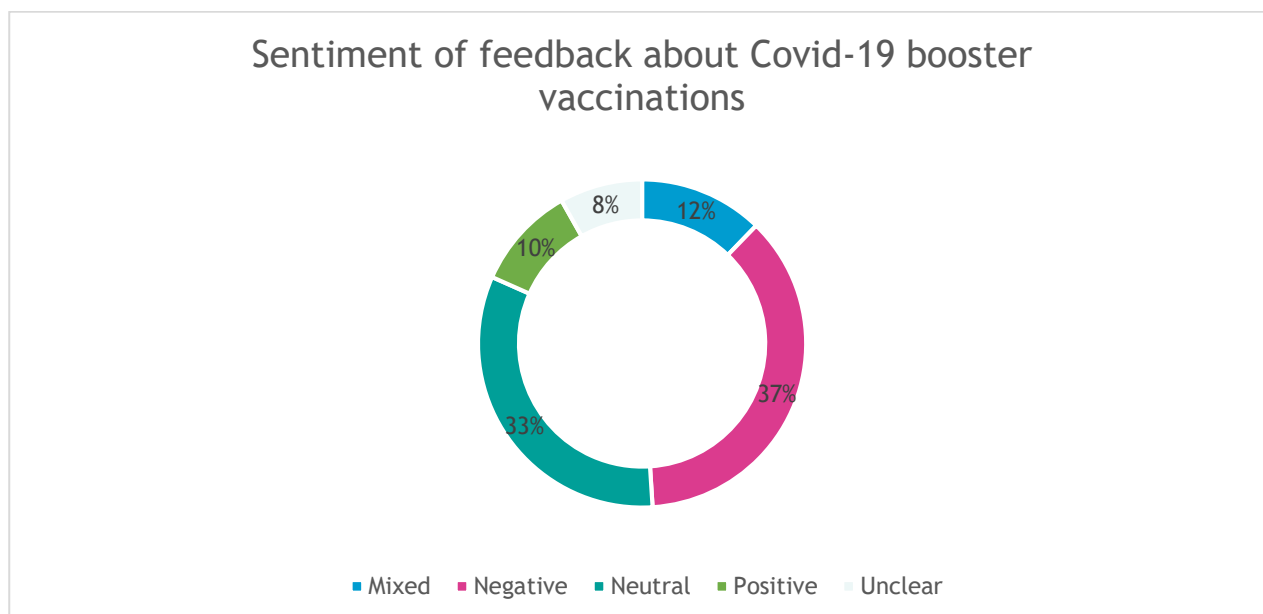
The data covers the period 15 July to 6 November 2021.

Overall data

Since the beginning of October, we have started to see increasing feedback about the booster programme.



There is a slight majority of negative sentiments associated with booster vaccines in our data so far. Cases that had a neutral sentiment were mainly from people asking about eligibility for the booster, how to book and which venues offered it. Negative sentiments were associated with the process of booking a booster vaccine appointment, particularly for some clinically vulnerable people, the lack of home appointments for people with lack of mobility and the location of the venues.



Themes

Access to information about the booster vaccine

A common theme in the feedback is people asking when they are eligible to receive the booster vaccine. These people are in one of the priority groups to receive the booster, and they don't know when they will get their jab. Some people are comparing the difference between the situation in their local area and in places where relatives and friends live:

"My twin who lives in [another part of the country] has had his COVID booster injection. He and I are both 71. I am keen to find out what is happening for my age group in North Yorkshire, and if the booster needs for the 70-75 age group are yet to be addressed, when will they be."

Reported to Healthwatch North Yorkshire on 19 October 2021

People also want to know about possible locations for the vaccine. It appears that this information may be more challenging to obtain for the booster programme:

"I am 68 and due a booster jab. How do I get one? I do not have a mobile phone. Can I go to a drop-in centre?"

Reported to Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough on 22 October 2021

People are also contacting their local Healthwatch to ask whether they can choose which vaccine they will get as a booster.

Booking a booster vaccine appointment

Most of the feedback received so far about booking an appointment has been negative. We have heard that people who have been told by either NHS England or their GP (or in some cases both) that they can book a booster jab, only to find when using the online booking system or calling 119 that they're booking too early.

"I received a text from the national booking service to book my booster jab. I went online to the NHS booking webpage and put in my details. It said I wasn't eligible yet and told me to get back in contact in 190 days and one week. If I wasn't eligible, why did I get the text saying to book?"

Reported to Healthwatch Shropshire on 1 November 2021

The recent government announcement that eligible people can book their booster jab in advance may mean we stop hearing about this issue. We will continue to monitor our feedback.

Location of and transport to booster vaccine clinics

People have told us that they are struggling to book the booster vaccine in a suitable nearby location. The only locations that they can book are some distance away from their home:

"Was only offered Covid Booster outside of Solihull on NHS website. I hear of much confusion in the rollout system for staff and patients, which may account for some slow uptake. Yet again, not an integrated operation."

Reported to Healthwatch Solihull on 3 November 2021

We have also had reports about people not being able to access booster vaccination locations easily. This experience may put them off booking an appointment to have the vaccination:

“Many people are not getting notification that they need to have the third jab. When they do, it is very difficult to get a jab in accessible places that can be used by taxicab. Not everyone is able to afford a taxi fare there and back; some of the jab sites do not have accessible access or are near to car access. For instance, we have a Boots Chemist doing it, which, although centrally accessible by foot, is quite some way from taxi or bus access if you are less able or in a wheelchair. The School option requires a 15-minute walk from the nearest bus stop. Some people who are technically disabled have to travel miles only to be confronted with more obstacles to get into the so-called walk-in jab centres. Some of these have stairs for entry or escalators which are unsafe for those using mobility aids and cannot be used by wheelchairs.”

Reported to Healthwatch England on 20 October 2021

We have heard that people who are housebound have experienced particular problems getting their booster vaccination. People cannot find any information about how they can get it:

Lady is housebound and would like the flu jab and COVID booster jab asap – wanted information on where to get the jab. There was no answer from district nurses' number, and GP surgery [was] only able to say that it would be in November.

Healthwatch Barnet – 1 November 2021

It seems that the same arrangements for GPs to vaccinate people at home may not be in place for the booster jabs:

“My relative is elderly, extremely vulnerable with complex health issues, blind and housebound, and I am their carer. They were originally overlooked for Covid jabs, no one knew why but we identified the error, and they had their jabs by home visit. They got a letter last week telling them to book a booster online. I contacted the C19 booster team and was told only the GP can refer for a booster at home. They have repeated this several times. I contacted the GP practice ..., they have shown little interest and simply repeat its nothing to do with them. I asked for a contact number to chase the 'home visit' team - they don't have it and stated my relative would be called in future. Poor old relative is now terrified and is sure they've been overlooked again, the booster is due, and a Covid infection would kill them. All they want is reassurance they're on the list for a home visit! I have nowhere left to go, and no one seems interested enough to help.”

Reported to Healthwatch Cambridgeshire and Peterborough on 4 November 2021

Third dose for severely immunosuppressed people

We have heard that people who were due a third dose of the vaccine because their immune systems are suppressed have difficulty arranging an appointment. The feedback we have received suggests that there is confusion between GPs and consultants, who are supposed to identify the ideal time for each individual to have their third dose, depending on their condition.

"I'm looking for advice and information on the 3rd dose of the Covid19 Vaccine. I have been contacted by NHS ... via text message and ... by NHS letter. I am considered as having a severely weakened immune system due to my health condition. Experts have recommended a third Dose for people like me because I need an additional dose to obtain adequate protection from Covid-19. This is different to a booster as it is part of the first ('primary,) course of the vaccine. So my question is, where can I access this? I have contacted my GP surgery, but they currently don't have any and don't know when or whether they will receive any.! I have also contacted my hospital consultant via his secretary, they don't seem to know anything either, other than the booster vaccine, but as has been pointed out to me, that is not what I need as yet. [I was] told to contact my GP again.! I'm guessing I'm not alone in this, but just wondering which way to turn. Worried about going out anywhere, as I don't feel that the two vaccines [that] I've already had are enough."

Reported to Healthwatch Halton on 26 October 2021

We have also heard that there may be no communication between GPs and consultants, which mean that immunosuppressed people may not be getting the suitable vaccine at the right time:

The caller is immuno-suppressed [and] ... has spoken to his specialist team who say they do not have the resources to contact relevant affected patients; GPs say they are waiting for specialists to inform them. They are unable to make the necessary contacts themselves. The medications taken by these immuno-suppressed people are prescribed by consultants and therefore do not appear on GPs' medical records – the system doesn't allow for cross-referencing and sharing of data. The caller's local GP said to go straight to a vaccination centre, which the caller did and received his third vaccination, but then discovered there is no way recording this on the app. There is no official record he has had a 3rd dose of the vaccination. So, there is now no way of knowing when his booster vaccination is due – or whether records, in fact show he has already had it! Green guide (chapter 14A) tells vaccinators what to do. It mentions the 3rd primary dose but gives no detail about what to ask. They should be asking, "when did you last take immune-suppressants, when did you stop taking them" – for the doses to work as effectively as possible, it is important to stop taking them temporarily for about 2 weeks before and 2 weeks after receiving a jab. ... Cornwall Council held a Q&A last week, and the caller posed a question about this issue. Truro Hospital said they were just about to send a letter to chemo patients, but this would not be applicable for those with long term immune-suppressed issues. So, four problems really: How can the affected patients get

their 3rd dose? Who should be letting them know they need it and when, and what to do with their medication just before and just after getting the dose? Why can't medication prescribed by consultants be cross-referenced to GPs? How can the 3rd dose be properly recorded in the notes?

Reported to Healthwatch Cornwall on 12 October 2021

Booked booster appointment but couldn't be vaccinated

We have heard about people who have booked booster appointments but could not have them for various reasons. Some were unable to have their vaccine at the time booked as the venue was closed:

The caller was contacted to book her booster vaccination at was given an appointment at 1.25pm on Friday. When she turned up, the pharmacy was closed, although staff could be seen. Eventually, someone came to the door and was told that she couldn't have an appointment as they were closed until 2 pm. She went away and came back later to find a number of people, all with appointment times prior to 2 pm, but none had been let in.

Reported to Healthwatch Suffolk on 1 November 2021

We have also heard from health workers who haven't booked at the 'correct' location:

"I just wanted to highlight the difficulty I've had receiving my covid booster vaccine at [vaccine venue]. I'm a frontline hospital consultant in an acute speciality and live in Devon, but work in Taunton. Bookings are on a national website with the use of my home postcode. Hence my appointment was booked near my home. On arrival, I was refused the vaccine as I work in Somerset. Very confused how I'm supposed to get my booster now."

Reported to Healthwatch Devon, Plymouth and Torbay on 7 October 2021

Other reasons for not getting the booster vaccine

We have heard from a couple of people who are hesitant or unwilling to have the booster vaccine. Some had a bad reaction to previous vaccines or are concerned by the efficacy of the vaccine:

The caller informed us that she had a nasty reaction (shivers, feeling unwell etc.) to the Pfizer Covid booster vaccination. Her previous vaccinations were both AstraZeneca, and she had no reactions to either of those. She is concerned for her husband, who has a heart condition and what his reaction could be to a different vaccination.

Reported to Healthwatch Essex on 6 October 2021

We have also heard that people whose vaccination record may be incorrect have had difficulties in getting the booster vaccine:

The caller had his initial covid injection in April and second vaccination at a local chemist and then received a telephone call a month or so later reminding [them] to go for the second dose. The caller then received a third call regarding the same issue and a further similar call from GP surgery. Caller reassured the GP that he had had two COVID injections. The caller is now struggling to book a booster dose online, which keeps being rejected. ... The caller is concerned that the vaccination record is incorrect. It is preventing [them] from getting the booster vaccination as [they] believe the second vaccination has not been entered into the system correctly despite [them] having a card vaccination record that records both vaccinations.

Reported to Healthwatch Halton on 26 October 2021

Experience of having the booster vaccine

Generally, the feedback that we have received about having the booster vaccine is positive. [*A visit by Healthwatch Norfolk to a Covid-19 booster clinic at Wymondham Practice*](#) found the experience was quick, smooth, and efficient and the staff were friendly and helpful.

The negative feedback we have had about this topic includes concerns about social distancing in venues, lack of parking, and long queues when clinics allow walk-in vaccines simultaneously as people who have pre-booked appointments.

Talk to us

If you have a question about the contents of this briefing, please get in touch with a member of our [*Policy or Research and Insight teams*](#)