

Scottish Government submission of 17 June 2022

PE1939/A: Amend the date of birth to allow wider accessibility to the HPV vaccination programme for boys

The Scottish Government position is clear, it is important that vaccines are given on time to protect people from vaccine-preventable diseases. It is important that people receive their immunisations at the right age to ensure maximum protection – from the first immunisation appointment, scheduled at two months of age, continuing through the teenage years and throughout adulthood.

Currently, vaccination policy in Scotland, as with the rest of the UK, is informed by recommendations from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI). The JCVI is an expert group which considers a full range of available evidence before providing advice on all aspects of vaccination, including eligibility, to each of the four UK health departments.

In line with the advice of the JCVI, the HPV vaccine has been offered to girls in S1 since 2008 and from 2019 it was agreed that this would be extended to include boys.

From 1 August 2019, the HPV immunisation programme in Scotland was extended to adolescent boys, with the vaccine offered to every pupil in their first year of secondary school (S1). The school-based HPV immunisation programme aims to help protect both boys and girls from developing HPV-related cancers later in life. The most common HPV-induced cancer is cervical cancer.

The routine HPV immunisation schedule is two doses of vaccine to complete the full course, typically given in S1 and S2. Eligible pupils who have not started or completed their course of immunisations are given other opportunities to be vaccinated in S3 and S4.

The policy set in Scotland for eligible cohorts for teenage immunisation programmes is defined by academic year as opposed to date of birth. Therefore any boy that was in S1 for the 2019/2020 academic year will be offered vaccination and remain eligible up to his 25th birthday. The Scottish policy (along with the rest of the UK) does not recommend a

catch up programme so any boys in academic years above S1 in 2019/2020 were not eligible.

Approaches to policy implementation across the devolved administrations can vary due to different factors and this has been seen in other childhood programmes in the past. School years can differ across the four Nations and hence different approaches are adopted however, children in S1 are usually 12 to 13 years old by the end of the academic session therefore a similar cohort. This is reflected in the associated Green Book Chapters, for example, in this case, there is a reference to DOB but specifically makes reference to England.

As mentioned above, the programme for girls began in 2008 and since its introduction, the prevalence of HPV infection has reduced dramatically amongst girls due to the direct protection provided by the vaccine. As this is a sexually transmitted infection, the incidence among boys has also reduced, due to indirect protection. The JCVI does not currently recommend a 'catch up' programme for boys, as evidence suggests they are already benefitting greatly from the indirect protection built up over 12 years of the girls' HPV vaccination programme.

When any vaccination programme is introduced decisions must be taken in relation to the eligibility criteria based on the available clinical advice. Further information around the JCVI's decision can be found at:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/726319/JCVI_Statement_on_HPВ_vaccination_2018.pdf