



VACCINES - HIGH LEVELS OF PROTECTION FOR AT-RISK GROUPS

Covid-19 vaccines offer high levels of protection for those with underlying conditions

Covid-19 vaccines offer high levels of protection for most people with underlying health conditions or who are immunosuppressed, Public Health England (PHE) has said.

New data from more than one million people in at-risk groups found that overall vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic disease was around 60% after one dose of either the AstraZeneca or Pfizer/BioNTech jabs, and did not fall substantially with age, PA news reports.

After two doses for those aged 16 to 64, Pfizer/BioNTech offered 93% protection, while AstraZeneca offered 78%. For those aged 65 and over, two doses of Pfizer/BioNTech offered 87% protection while AstraZeneca offered 76%.

For people who are immunosuppressed, vaccine effectiveness after a second dose was 74%, with similar protection to those who are not in an at-risk group.

This rises from 4% after a first dose, showing the importance of a second dose.

Some health conditions are linked to an increased risk of hospital admission and death from Covid-19, including diabetes, severe asthma, chronic heart, kidney or liver disease, neurological disease, and illnesses or therapies that weaken the immune system, such as blood cancer, HIV or chemotherapy.

PHE said that protection for these people against hospital admission and death is expected to be even higher than for symptomatic Covid illness.

Dr Mary Ramsay, head of immunisation at PHE, said: "This real-world data shows for the first time that most people who are clinically vulnerable to Covid-19 still receive high levels of protection after two doses of vaccine.

She said:

It is vital that anyone with an underlying condition gets both doses, especially people with weakened immune systems as they gain so much more benefit from the second dose.



It comes after 16 health charities joined forces to urge the Government to support around 500,000 people who are immunocompromised or immunosuppressed.

The charities included Anthony Nolan, Blood Cancer UK, Bowel Cancer UK, Cystic Fibrosis Trust and the MS Society.

Advice from the government for the vulnerable to shield was paused on April 1 and there are currently no plans to advise people to shield again.

The charities said they wanted better communication from the government and the NHS to inform patients, the wider public and employers about the continued risks that Covid-19 poses to immunocompromised people.

They also want employment protection and access to workplace adjustments for immunocompromised people, including the duty to consider working from home wherever possible and flexibility in start and finish times so as to avoid peak-time travel.