



What's wrong with vaccinating teenagers?

Description

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has recommended that all 16- and 17-year-olds should be offered a first dose of the Covid vaccine.

The decision has been expected for some time. Not least as it brings the UK closer into line with the US, France, Italy and many other advanced countries. In fact, many are vaccinating much younger children, usually everyone above the age of 12.

Just as expected has been the backlash from the vaccine-hesitant, vaccine-sceptical and outright anti-vaxxers. As ever, social media are awash with the usual lines about an 'experimental' vaccine (or 'gene therapy', as some insist on calling it). And now it is apparently being foisted on our innocent children, against their will, putting them at great risk.

But the vaccine is not mandatory (though we certainly have to oppose any attempt to bring in 'vaccine passports' which would bring in mandatory vaccination by the back door). Indeed, I suspect even fewer teenagers will take it up than the 18-30s, who the government is struggling, fruitlessly, to cajole into getting the jab with a bizarre mixture of [threats](#) and [discounts at McDonald's](#). (Boris is said to be 'raging' at the low take-up among young adults.)

Nor is it as dangerous for teenagers as is being made out. One of the most talked-about side-effects is heart inflammation. This is extremely rare, and is typically mild. Yes, [five people in Europe have died](#) from heart inflammation after taking either the Pfizer or Moderna vaccine, though they have all been elderly. The young people unfortunate enough to get this rare side-effect typically recover in short order.

Given the extremely low risk [Covid-19](#) poses to young people, there is a sensible debate to be had about how to balance those risks with the risks posed by the vaccine. That is why the JCVI has taken its time in forming its decision, despite being put under enormous political pressure. (And it is still

holding out on whether teens should get a second dose, and whether 12- to 15-year-olds should be offered the vaccine – much to the consternation of politicians.)

But to pretend that it is simply too great a risk for young people to get vaccinated distorts that balance of risks – neither Covid nor vaccination is dangerous for the healthy young.

Claims about killer vaccines are yet another species of the scaremongering that has made life so intolerable over the past 18 months. The media shamelessly hunted down every young and fit person who had a spell in hospital to point a camera in their face – giving the false impression that Covid affects all age groups equally. And a coterie of activist-experts made exaggerated and irresponsible claims about children being at risk of severe disability if they were ever allowed to return to school. It is surely just as wrong and irresponsible to claim the vaccines will cause so much damage to teenagers.

Some also claim that under-18s should not be made to shoulder the risk of the vaccine when the main beneficiaries would be adults much older than them. But even without being vaccinated they are eventually going to do the same, albeit unwittingly. Infection-acquired immunity also entails a small risk that will later help to protect others who are more at risk. Vaccinating younger people would get us to the point of herd immunity faster than random infection.

There is, however, one important question raised by the drive to vaccinate teenagers in the UK: is this the best use of vaccines for humanity as a whole? The rich world has a super-abundance of vaccines. The UK has ordered 217million vaccine doses (of those types approved so far) – enough to double-dose every adult twice. Meanwhile, many countries in the developing world, where the pandemic is still raging, are struggling to vaccinate their most vulnerable and their healthcare workers. Perhaps the humanitarian thing to do is to give up a much larger proportion of our vaccines to those most in need. Of course, that only makes sense if you believe the vaccines are effective and safe, rather than experimental and dangerous.

Otherwise, it is hard to see what the fuss is all about.

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