

People with learning disabilities and the coronavirus vaccine: Information for paid supporters

Learning Disability England has written this document for people and organisations that offer paid support to people with learning disabilities; provider organisations or personal assistants to help them prepare the people they support to make a decision about having the Coronavirus vaccine. We hope it will also be useful to people and families.

Keep informed and in touch during coronavirus by visiting our special coronavirus information and work hub.



Visit the hub
here

1. Knowing the facts about

- People need to understand what coronavirus is and that it can be serious
- People with learning disabilities are up to six times more likely to die of coronavirus than the general population
- People need to know that coronavirus and COVID19 are the same thing

There are lots of easy read resources that explain coronavirus and people need to have the chance to look at them and get any questions they have answered. Understanding what coronavirus is and how serious it can be is vital before people can make a decision about getting the vaccine.

Here are links to more information on the facts about coronavirus

2. Knowing the facts about vaccines

- People need to know what a vaccine is, how they work and how they can keep them safe from illness
- Lots of people will have had the flu jab, but might not recognise this as the same as a vaccine for coronavirus

Here are links to more information on the facts about vaccines

3. Knowing if someone should NOT have the vaccine

- For most people the coronavirus vaccine is completely safe
- The guidance from January 2021 is that people should **not** have the coronavirus vaccine if they have had a serious allergic reaction (this means anaphylaxis) to:
 - a previous vaccine
 - a previous dose of the same coronavirus vaccine
 - some medicines, household products or cosmetics
- If the person you support has had any serious allergic reactions, then support them to talk to their GP, practice nurse or learning disabilities nurse
- You can't have the coronavirus vaccine if you have had a flu jab in the last 7 days or if you have tested positive for coronavirus in the last 28 days

Here are links to more information on knowing if someone should NOT have the vaccine

4. Making a decision to have the coronavirus vaccine

- The decision whether or not to have the coronavirus vaccine must be made by the person. They need to be able to make an informed decision. This means that they need:
 - Good information about the vaccine and the benefits it can give
 - To know what the side effects of having the vaccine may be
 - To know what could happen if they choose not to have the vaccine
- When helping a person make a decision, it is important to think about what helps them make good decisions and the type of information that works for them. They may want friends or family to help them make the decision.
- It could be useful for workers who have had the vaccine to share their experience of what happened and how the process work, or for friends and family of the person who have had it.
- It is important that workers who are worried about the vaccine do not try and put the person off.
- It is also important that people are not persuaded – they need clear and factual information
- If the person, after looking at all the information decides not to have the vaccine, that is their choice, and they must not be treated unfairly or made to feel bad for that decision.

If....

- you have tried lots of different ways of helping the person you support understand about the coronavirus vaccine and
- you still feel that the person is not able to understand the information about the vaccine and therefore not able to make a decision...

Then a 'best-interests' decision must be made by relevant professionals in accordance with the Mental Capacity Act 2005

Here are links to more information about making the decision to have the coronavirus vaccine

5. Preparing to get the vaccine

The more preparation you can do to support people to know about what happens when they get the vaccine the better.

- make sure that the person you support is on the learning disability register at their GP
- know which priority group for the coronavirus vaccine the person is in. In the national guidance, most people with learning disabilities are in priority group six, but some people with underlying health conditions will be in priority group four, so it is important that you support the person to make sure their GP is aware of all their underlying health conditions. Some local areas are setting a higher priority for people with learning disabilities and it is worth finding that out locally
- reassure the person and their family that they will be invited to have the vaccine when it is their turn
- If you are supporting people in a care home or supported living, it might be easier for the vaccinator to come to the home if that's what the person wants. Contact the GP and let them know how many people you support and what priority group they are in
- Help people work through anxieties and know exactly what is going to happen as much as possible. People are often worried about needles and a desensitising programme may help

Here are links to more information about preparing to get the vaccine

6. Getting the vaccine

Make sure the person has as much information as possible about the process of getting the vaccine before they go.

- By the time the person goes to get their vaccine it should be really clear that they are happy to have it. The vaccinator needs to be clear that the person they are giving the vaccine to is giving their consent. Supporters can help the vaccinator get consent from the person by sharing information about how they communicate
- There will be different places locally where you can get your vaccine. There are big centres as well as GP surgeries and pharmacies. It might be quicker to go to one of the big centres but if the person you support struggles with lots of noise, or people or waiting then it might be better for them to choose their GP surgery
- People might need some reasonable adjustments to the process of getting their vaccine. Help them think about what would make it easier:
 - going at the beginning or end of a day
 - somewhere to wait that is quiet
 - having someone they know well with them
 - having the vaccine given to them by someone who they have met before
 - having local anaesthetic on their arm before the vaccination

Here are links to more information about getting the vaccine