

Local vaccination programme news- and why EVERYONE over 18 should take up the offer of a vaccine when they are invited.

Firstly, a huge thank you and congratulations to everyone who is helping to ensure the safety and future prosperity of our local community by helping administer the vaccination programme, and by being vaccinated. To date, the A1 network of practices (covering Alconbury and Brampton, Wellside, Buckden and Little Paxton, Kimbolton and Almond road surgeries) have covered 70% of over 40s and people with underlying health conditions which put them at increased risk from covid with a first dose of vaccine, and almost 26% with a second dose. That is a total of almost 35,000 vaccinations, mostly given in the GP practice hubs at Alconbury and Little Paxton. We are very grateful to our fabulous team of volunteers who help make this possible without too much disruption to the essential day to day NHS GP work.

We are finding that almost everyone over 60 was keen to take up the offer of vaccination, but it seems quite hard work to persuade some of the under 50s to book their vaccine, and we are needing to spend time sending reminders to mobile phones and calling people at home. We are very fortunate to have supplies of vaccine (partly because our skilled vaccinators are able to ensure that they draw up full additional doses out of vials), and have therefore been able to invite people earlier than expected in many cases. If you are invited to the GP hub, you will get a text addressed to you personally, with a link to book, from your registered GP practice, or sometimes from the A1 network. The booking link is legitimate and not a scam, and you can also use it to tell us you do not want the vaccine, or have booked elsewhere. It helps us enormously if you do use the link, because it saves time for practice staff, who could be dealing with other healthcare issues. We will be calling people aged 30 to 40 in the near future, and are currently calling those over 40, and reminding everyone who has another risk factor or is over 40 and has not yet been immunised, to have a vaccination. For second doses, you will be called to book an appointment by the GP hub between 8 and 12 weeks from the date of your first vaccination.

Everyone can book at the local GP hub at Alconbury for their vaccine (even if they have been invited by the national booking service, when they could be offered any available vaccination centre within a 45 minute drive). If you have recently moved, and are not yet registered, you are still able to book by calling Alconbury surgery.

So why does everyone need to be vaccinated, even though people under 50 are less likely to be seriously ill with covid? One reason is that, by having a large percentage of the total population vaccinated, both the ease of transmission of the virus, and the total viral load carried by individuals is reduced (even if the vaccine isn't fully effective at preventing illness or transmission- all vaccines in use in the UK definitely reduce both). What this does is to reduce the likelihood of new variants persisting in the population, because they still appear (viruses mutate all the time) but are less likely to be spread, and in this situation they just fade away, rather than getting a hold. Another reason is that young people can still get "long covid", which is a very debilitating consequence of infection, which might not be severe enough to put you in hospital, but causes weakness, exhaustion, fevers and sometimes breathing problems for months or even years afterwards. And, of course, vaccines are extremely effective at preventing severe illness and hospitalisations or deaths, which are less common but still possible for younger people.

What about side effects? Most people over 30 will now be getting the Astra Zeneca vaccine. This causes some flu like symptoms for about 48 hours in about 30% of people, for the first dose, but is very unlikely to cause any problems with the second. The issue about blood clots is a very rare complication (around 1 in 250,000 people, less than half the risk of a blood clot in a woman taking the oral contraceptive pill) and covid itself causes a much higher rate of blood clotting (with a different mechanism). More information is available here [COVID-19 vaccination and blood clotting - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/covid-19-vaccination-and-blood-clotting) For Pfizer, side effects are less common with the first dose, but more common with the second. However, for any of the vaccines the risks of covid massively outweigh any side effects or risks.

You can help us to help you by making sure your GP has an up to date mobile number, checking your mobile phone (and that of elderly relatives!) , and booking as soon as you get a text. If you do not have a mobile phone, we will either write to you or call your home number, but you can also call Alconbury surgery to book yourself. Please spread the word to encourage vaccination and help us all return to normal as soon as possible! Thanks

Dr Francesca Lasman

A1 Primary care network