

LEARNING FROM THE COVID VACCINATION PROGRAMME

REDUCING HEALTH INEQUALITIES THROUGH
EXPANDED ACCESS TO VACCINATIONS IN
COMMUNITY PHARMACY

20
24

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Between December 2020 and August 2024, community pharmacies in England delivered **over 42 million** Covid vaccinations.

This is **over a quarter (25.5%)** of the 165 million vaccines administered delivered so far.

The latest data shows high uptake of vaccines in community pharmacies among groups statistically more likely to show vaccine hesitancy.

More than half of all Covid vaccinations delivered to Black/Black British, Asian/Asian British and mixed ethnicity groups were delivered in community pharmacies.

Nationally there have been recent drops in uptake of many crucial vaccines and a corresponding surge in disease.

Tackling this is a vital step in the government's commitment to *“prevention rather than treatment of illness”*.



The Covid vaccination programme has shown how community pharmacy can support with **uptake**, particularly in traditionally underserved groups.

NHS England should **commission community pharmacies to deliver a wider range of NHS vaccines** including pneumonia, shingles, meningitis, RSV and routine childhood vaccinations.

We estimate pharmacies could deliver an additional 10 million vaccines. Alongside existing services, this would increase access and give patients more choice. This would create additional NHS capacity at a time when all parts of the NHS are under pressure.

TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES THROUGH COMMUNITY PHARMACY

Community pharmacies in England have delivered 42 million Covid vaccinations between December 2020 and August 2024. This is over a quarter (25.5%) of the 165 million vaccines administered so far. [1]

The use of pharmacies has increased patient access, particularly for underserved communities.



Healthcare suffers from an “*inverse care law*”, meaning that communities with the greatest health needs often have a lower level of access to hospitals, GPs, and dentists. [2] Community pharmacies however, buck this trend - there is increased access in areas of higher deprivation. This is known as the “*positive pharmacy care law*”. [3]

Pharmacies are located conveniently on high streets, in shopping centres and at transport hubs. Many have long opening hours, including on the weekend and in the evenings. As a result, they are often more accessible to patients than other healthcare settings.

“New uptake data shows increased access to Covid vaccinations in pharmacies for groups more likely to show vaccine hesitancy.”

The sector has shown time and time again that it is well placed to reach underserved groups and to support those who need it the most. **In 2021, over a third of community pharmacy Covid vaccines were provided in the 20% most deprived communities.** [4] CCA analysis also found that in the first month of the Pharmacy First service, **two and half times more consultations were delivered in more deprived areas.** [5]

New uptake data shows increased access to Covid vaccinations in pharmacies for groups more likely to show vaccine hesitancy.

More than half of all Covid vaccinations delivered to Black/Black British, Asian/ Asian British, mixed and Chinese or other ethnic groups in Spring 2024 were delivered in community pharmacies.

There are high levels of uptake in community pharmacy, including for groups more likely to show vaccine hesitancy.

Vaccine hesitancy

A 2022 review found that vaccine hesitancy was more common among individuals from Black, Asian, and mixed ethnic backgrounds.[6]

The 2021 census found that Black/Black British adults had the highest rates of vaccine hesitancy (21%) in Great Britain. It also found that adults living in the most deprived areas of England are more likely to report vaccine hesitancy (8%) than adults living in the least deprived area (2%).[7]

Ethnicity	Proportion of covid vaccines delivered in community pharmacy in Spring 2024 [1]
Black/ Black British	55%
Asian/ Asian British	62%
Mixed	54%
Chinese or other ethnic group	58%
White	48%

“There are high levels of uptake in community pharmacy, including for groups more likely to show vaccine hesitancy”



ADDRESSING DROPS IN VACCINE UPTAKE

The most recent data shows a drop in vaccine uptake

To achieve herd immunity the World Health Organisation recommends childhood vaccination rates of 95%.

In 2023/24 no vaccines met this target and health experts warned of a “tipping point” with low uptake putting children at risk of catching severe diseases.

In 2023/24 only **83.4%** of five-year-olds had received both doses of the MMR jab and only **89.4%** of five years olds has received the Hib/ Men C vaccine - well below the rate required for herd immunity. [8]

Likewise, uptake of the whooping cough vaccine, offered to all pregnant women between 16 and 32 weeks of pregnancy sat at **59%** in the third quarter of 2023. This reflects a **15% drop** compared with 2016/17.[9]



Without sufficient uptake, these diseases cannot be controlled. There is a risk they will spread across the population, infecting those yet to be or unable to be vaccinated.

There is a growing need to consider how patients could be better supported to vaccinate themselves and their children. It is natural that people have questions and concerns about vaccines. Community pharmacies are well placed to answer questions, provide reliable information, and dispel myths.

The PERISCOPE rapid review found that pharmacy colleagues are trusted sources of information.

Staff members, who are often members of the community they work in, already hold strong relationships with local populations and are particularly well positioned to understand culturally relevant factors. [10]

The study also found that patients attend pharmacies **12 times more** frequently than GPs.

This provides more opportunities to provide care and offer lifesaving vaccinations. Many pharmacies offer these vaccines privately.

However, most pharmacies **cannot** provide NHS-funded vaccines as they are not commissioned to do so. This means they must refer patients to another provider – adding barriers to accessing care.

MAKING THE MOST OF COMMUNITY PHARMACIES THROUGH ENHANCED VACCINE ACCESS

NHS England should commission community pharmacies to deliver a wider range of NHS vaccines. This should include pneumonia, shingles, meningitis, RSV, and routine childhood vaccinations.

The government has set out *“prevention rather than treatment of illness”* as one of its core health priorities. Vaccinations are one of the most successful and cost-effective ways to prevent ill health.[11]

The NHS vaccination strategy also sets out *“vaccination delivery in convenient local places, with targeted outreach to support uptake in underserved population”* as a core priority. It highlights availability in GP practices and pharmacies, as well as shopping centres, supermarkets, and community centres, as central to this.[12]

As well as being conveniently located, and trusted and reliable sources of information, community pharmacists are also extremely experienced providers of vaccines. They have played a central role in the delivery of Covid vaccinations.

Last year they administered over 3.5 million flu vaccinations, as well as a host of private vaccinations.[13] This includes travel vaccinations, shingles, HPV, chickenpox, meningitis B, RSV and pneumonia and covers all patients, including children and babies over the age of 1.

We must now build on this.

Case study: Delivery of MMR vaccines in community pharmacy

In 2024, a pharmacy MMR vaccine programme was commissioned in the Northwest of England in response to rising cases of measles.

People over the age of 5 who have not had both doses of the MMR vaccines can get fully protected by visiting one of 43 pharmacies across Greater Manchester, Cheshire and Merseyside and Lancashire and South Cumbria.

The programme recognises the accessibility of pharmacies and aims to increase uptake of the MMR vaccine in areas where people are at greater risk due to the high number of people who are not up to date with their MMR vaccinations. Whilst this is currently a locally enhanced service, NHS England should consider how this can be expanded to other high risk areas.

CONCLUSION

Pharmacies have demonstrated they can adapt quickly to meet the needs of millions of patients. However, **the CCA estimates that community pharmacies could deliver an additional 10 million vaccines each year.**

This would improve population health and support the needs of underserved patient groups with traditionally lower vaccine uptake.

Commissioning pharmacies to supplement the existing vaccine offer would support the **prevention of ill health**. It would **improve access** and **support higher coverage particularly for those in underserved groups.**

It would also **build NHS capacity**, by freeing up capacity in general practice and in hospitals.

This is particularly important, given the extremes pressures all parts of the system currently face.



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WHO WE ARE

Established in 1898, the CCA is the trade association for large pharmacy operators in England, Scotland and Wales. The CCA membership includes ASDA, Boots, Morrisons, Pharmacy2U, Rowlands Pharmacy, Superdrug, Tesco, and Well, who between them own and operate around 5,500 pharmacies, which represents nearly half the market. CCA members deliver a broad range of healthcare and wellbeing services, from a variety of locations and settings, as well as dispensing 500 million NHS prescription items every year. The CCA represents the interests of its members and brings together their unique skills, knowledge, and scale for the benefit of community pharmacy, the NHS, patients and the public.



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