

How will I know if I or my child is being offered an 'off-label' vaccine?

Your nurse or doctor is obliged to tell you before vaccination because you have to give consent to proceed. So it is your decision whether you or your child has it or not. However, the nurse or doctor would only recommend it to avoid any delay in your child getting protection against a serious infection and if they were sure the vaccine was still safe and effective.

But my friend received a letter telling her that a vaccine she had already received had been stored incorrectly. Why did this happen?

This can happen occasionally because the interruption in the 'cold chain' has only been noticed after the vaccination has been given. Often you will not need to do anything but, if needed, public health experts in the local NHS area team will write to you telling you about the problem and recommending what actions you should take.

The NHS takes breaches of medicines storage very seriously, and has a duty to let you know if this has occurred. If the event is not considered to have affected the vaccines, the local NHS experts will advise that no action needs to be taken at all.

Isn't using off-label vaccines just a way of saving money?

No, it would be a waste of public money to throw away expensive vaccines unnecessarily. It's also better to use the vaccines readily available in the surgery than to delay vaccinating you or your child who might be at risk of a serious infection, or to run out of vaccine for another patient.

Summary

- It is recommended that vaccines are kept between +2°C and +8°C to maintain their effectiveness
- If a vaccine is stored outside this recommended temperature range it doesn't mean it can't be used
- Vaccines that have been recommended for use after falling outside this approved temperature range are called 'off-label' vaccines
- Off-label vaccines are still licensed – they are just being used in a different way from that stated in their licence
- Off-label vaccines can still be safe and effective

The use of vaccines that have been temporarily stored outside the recommended temperature range

A brief guide for parents, carers and patients