

Consultation launched on staff COVID-19 vaccines in care homes with older adult residents

- Consultation launches today on making COVID vaccination a condition of work for people who are deployed in these homes
- Care home workers urged to take up offer of a vaccine now to keep themselves and those they care for safe

Making vaccines a condition of deployment would help to further protect older people living in care homes, who are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19, with some providers already implementing similar policies.

Experts on the social care working group of SAGE advise 80% of staff and 90% of residents need to be vaccinated to provide a minimum level of protection against outbreaks of COVID-19. Only 53% of older adult homes in England are currently meeting this threshold.

This means nearly half of all care homes with older adult residents, home to 150,000 vulnerable people, don't meet SAGE's recommended vaccination thresholds for care homes and staff.

Currently the staff vaccination rate is below 80% in 89 local authority areas – more than half – and all 32 London boroughs. There are 27 local authority areas with a staff vaccination rate below 70%.

The vaccine has already had a significant impact on reducing hospitalisations and deaths, with more than 10,000 lives saved between December and March but as we progress through the roadmap and restrictions begin to ease, it is vital we continue to protect those who are most vulnerable to the virus.

A [5-week consultation](#) will be launched today looking at requiring care home providers, caring for older adults, to deploy only those workers who have received their COVID-19 vaccination to further protect residents who are among the most vulnerable to COVID-19, and staff.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Older people living in care homes are most at risk of suffering serious consequences of COVID-19 and we have seen the grave effects the virus has had on this group.

Making vaccines a condition of deployment is something many care homes have called for, to help them provide greater protection for staff and residents in older people's care homes and so save lives.

The vaccine is already preventing deaths and is our route out of this pandemic. We have a duty of care to those most vulnerable to

COVID-19, so it is right we consider all options to keep people safe.

This will not include those who can provide evidence of a medical exemption from COVID-19 vaccination.

With some providers already implementing similar policies, the consultation will help inform decision-making around how the change could be implemented and whether respondents think it will be beneficial.

The consultation will seek views on the proposal, it's scope, any potential impact it could have on staffing and safety as well as how it is implemented and who could be exempt.

Staff, providers, stakeholders, residents and their families are being urged to take part to have their views heard with a final decision expected this summer.

Chair of the Adult Social Care COVID-19 Taskforce, David Pearson said:

I would like to thank all our social care workers for providing care and support during the last very difficult year, for having the vaccine and supporting people who have social care services to be vaccinated.

It is absolutely vital those who have not yet taken the opportunity to have their vaccine do so to keep themselves and those they care for safe.

NHS England has been running a minimum 4-visit schedule for each older adult care home and with hundreds of vaccination centres across the country to make vaccinations as easy as possible.

Vaccination is a safe and effective way of protecting people from infectious disease. Vaccines help prevent the most serious symptoms and there is growing evidence the vaccine also reduces transmission, making having a vaccine even more important.

This will build on the successful rollout of priority vaccinations in care homes with more than 40 million vaccinations given.

Taking up the COVID-19 vaccine will protect those who work in care homes, their colleagues, residents and provide reassurance to their families.

All eligible care homes have been visited and vaccines offered to staff and residents, with the vast majority of homes having now had repeat visits.

When people are called to get the vaccine, they should get their jab. Vaccines are the best way out of this pandemic and provide strong protection against COVID-19.

All the approved vaccines are safe, effective and have already saved thousands of lives.

There has already been a significant impact of the vaccination programme on reducing hospitalisations and deaths, with more than 10,000 lives saved by vaccinations between December and March.

Last week, the JCVI advised that it is preferable for adults aged under 30 with no underlying conditions to be offered an alternative to the AstraZeneca vaccine where available.

The MHRA – the UK's independent regulator – and the JCVI have said the benefits of the vaccine far outweigh the risks for the vast majority of adults.

Requiring care home providers, caring for older adults, to deploy only those workers who have received their COVID-19 vaccination will increase uptake in these areas and assist in helping all care providers reach the required rate of uptake to keep people safe and save lives.

We continue to do all we can to protect care homes, including spending £1.35 billion on infection and prevention control and offering priority vaccines, free PPE and rapid testing.

Barchester Healthcare chief executive Dr Pete Calveley said:

Barchester believes the vaccination programme has transformed the outlook for the vulnerable residents in older people care homes, a significant proportion of whom will not acquire full immunity despite being vaccinated.

We have not lightly introduced our vaccine policy, but we take the view that providing safe care for those we care for is our paramount obligation.

As the Chief Medical Officer has said, it is a professional duty for care home staff to accept the vaccine unless there is a medical reason they should not.

As time has progressed, the safety, efficacy and transmission-reduction evidence has become ever stronger, which supports our initial view.

For those reasons we support the proposal by the DHSC to open a consultation on this important matter and strongly encourage other providers to support this proposal.

The [Making vaccination a condition of deployment in older adult care homes](#) consultation has been published.

Some individuals have an allergy or condition where the Green Book or the

Joint Committee of Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advises seeking medical advice, before proceeding with vaccination, where a professional medical opinion should be sought on whether the individual should be exempt. We will ensure that the regulations allow for exemptions on medical grounds. The regulations will be drafted in line with the Green Book on Immunisation against infectious disease ([COVID-19: the green book, chapter 14a](#) and JCVI which reflect clinical advice.

Both nationally and internationally, no concerning safety signals have been identified so far in relation to the vaccination of women who are pregnant. JCVI is continuing to review data on the risks and benefit of vaccination for women without significant underlying health conditions who are pregnant. As evidence becomes available, it will be reviewed, and advice offered as appropriate.