

# Everyone working in care homes to be fully vaccinated under new law to protect residents



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Decision follows an extensive public consultation with thousands of staff, providers, residents and families

Further consultation will be launched on whether to extend to other health and social care settings

Care home residents will be better protected from death and serious illness, following confirmation people working in care homes will need to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

The new legislation means from October – subject to Parliamentary approval and a subsequent 16-week grace period – anyone working in a CQC-registered care home in England for residents requiring nursing or personal care must have 2 doses of a COVID-19 vaccine unless they have a medical exemption.

It will apply to all workers employed directly by the care home or care home provider (on a full-time or part-time basis), those employed by an agency and deployed by the care home, and volunteers deployed in the care home.

Those coming into care homes to do other work, for example healthcare workers, tradespeople, hairdressers and beauticians, and CQC inspectors will also have to follow the new regulations, unless they have a medical exemption.

The responses to the consultation made a case for extending this policy beyond care homes to other settings where people vulnerable to COVID-19 receive care, such as domiciliary care and wider healthcare settings.

Based on this evidence, the government will launch a further public consultation in due course on whether or not to make COVID-19 and flu vaccination a condition of deployment in health and care settings. This is a complex issue and the government is looking for a wide range of perspectives from across the health and care sector about whether this should be introduced and how it could be implemented.

Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock said:

Vaccines save lives and while staff and residents in care homes have been prioritised and the majority are now vaccinated we need to do everything we can to keep reducing the risk.

Through our consultation we have listened to the experiences and concerns of providers and people living and working in care homes to help shape our approach.

We have a responsibility to do all we can to safeguard those receiving care including in the NHS and so will be consulting further on whether to extend to other health and social care workers.

This is the right thing to do and a vitally important step to continue protecting care homes now and in the future. I'd urge anyone working in care homes to get their jab as soon as possible.

There will be exceptions for visiting family and friends, under 18s, emergency services and people undertaking urgent maintenance work.

Data on vaccine effectiveness from Public Health England (PHE) indicates the COVID-19 vaccination programme has so far prevented 14,000 deaths and around 42,000 hospitalisations in older people in England (up to 30 May).

The new regulations follow an extensive consultation with the social care sector, staff, residents and their families on the issue.

Minister for Care, Helen Whately said:

People working in care homes have played an incredibly important role throughout the pandemic caring for those most at risk from this terrible virus.

The vaccine is working, with over 14,000 lives saved so far. It's only right that we take every possible step to protect those most at risk now and in the long term.

I want to take this opportunity to urge everyone working in social care to take up the jab if they haven't already to protect those they care for, themselves and those they work alongside.

The Social Care Working Group of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) advises that an uptake rate for one dose of 80% in staff and 90% in residents in each individual care home setting is needed to provide a minimum level of protection against outbreaks of COVID-19.

While the majority of care home workers have now been vaccinated, only 65% of older care homes in England are currently meeting the minimum level of staff uptake for one dose needed to reduce the risk of outbreaks in these high-risk care settings – falling to 44% of care homes in London.

Chief Nurse for Adult Social Care, Professor Deborah Sturdy said:

I would like to thank all our social care workers for continuing to provide incredible care and support during the last very difficult year, for having the vaccine and supporting those in social care to be vaccinated.

We are seeing vaccines are important in saving lives and it is absolutely vital that anyone who has not yet taken up the opportunity should do so to keep themselves and those they care for safe.

Dr Mary Ramsay, Head of Immunisation at PHE, said:

Vaccines are the most important tool we have against COVID-19 and they have already saved thousands of lives.

Having a high level of protection in care homes will reduce the risk to this very vulnerable population.

Evidence shows that 2 doses of the vaccine offers high levels of protection against hospitalisation from COVID-19. We also know that getting both doses of your jab reduces your risk of unknowingly passing the virus on to others.

That's why it is vitally important to get both doses of your vaccine as soon as they are offered to you, to protect you and those around you. The more people that get 2 doses of the vaccine, the more lives will be saved.

Dr Pete Calveley, CEO of Barchester, said:

We believe that we should all do whatever possible to protect the most vulnerable of society, therefore we welcome the government's proposal to require everyone working in a care home to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

We took the decision in February that staff working in a Barchester care home or hospital must be vaccinated and we have carried out extensive engagement programmes with staff, as well as one-to-one support to encourage this.

As a result we are seeing strong uptake and positive engagement with COVID-19 vaccination, and we are delighted that the outcome is that 99% of our staff are willing to have the vaccine.

There has been a very high level of engagement with the consultation from care home staff, providers, stakeholders, residents and their families, in addition to the wider public. Over 13,500 responses were received for the consultation and they have been comprehensively analysed and carefully considered.

The original scope of the consultation proposed applying this to only those care homes who look after someone aged 65 and over, though following the consultation it became clear of the need to extend this to all CQC-registered care homes providing nursing and personal care.

There was significant support for broadening the scope of the policy to include all those coming into close contact with residents; and some support to include all those entering care homes, in any capacity. We have carefully considered a range of options regarding the extent to which the policy should be extended to other working or visiting adults in care homes.

Regulations will be laid before Parliament as secondary legislation at the earliest opportunity.

If approved by Parliament, there will be a 16-week grace period from when the regulations are made to when they come into force to enable staff who haven't been vaccinated to take up the vaccine. A majority of adult social care staff will be eligible for their second dose 8 weeks after their first.

People may not yet have taken up the offer of a vaccine for a number of reasons including availability, being within 28 days of having COVID-19 or for personal reasons.

The government has been working to make the vaccination accessible to people living and working in care homes – the NHS has visited all eligible care homes in England and offered vaccines to all staff, and the government continues to work closely with the care sector, independent healthcare providers and local leaders, to maximise vaccination numbers and save lives.

For those workers who may not have been present when the vaccination team visited the home, access via other vaccination services has been available, including through an online booking platform where people can book a vaccination at the time and place of their choosing.

More than 1.2 million social care workers (78%) in England have now taken up the vaccination – an important step in protecting themselves, their loved ones, and the people they care for from becoming seriously ill or dying from COVID-19.

Working together with the NHS and PHE, the government is providing advice and information at every possible opportunity to support those getting the vaccine and to anyone who might have questions about the vaccination

process to encourage people to come forward and get a jab when the offer comes.

## Background information

See the consultation response on making vaccination a condition of deployment in care homes.

It will only apply to people who need to enter the building.

On 13 February we published our UK COVID-19 vaccine uptake plan, which aims to improve uptake across all communities. The vaccine uptake plan takes a local, community-led approach, with support provided from government, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) and local authorities to coordinate and enable action.

As part of this, a new Vaccination Equalities Committee, led by NHSEI, has brought together government departments with national representatives from the Association of Directors of Public Health, local authorities, fire and police services and third sector organisations to advise and guide the vaccine deployment programme on addressing inequalities.

We are also delivering a targeted programme of work to support vaccine uptake among adult social care staff and care home staff specifically, working with national and local stakeholders, including care home managers. In order to address any questions and concerns among care home workers (and the wider adult social care workforce), we have delivered an extensive communications programme. This includes:

bespoke communications materials (posters, videos, leaflets, and shareable social media assets), weekly newsletter, and adult social care and Department of Health and Social Care social channels

stakeholder toolkit (Q, guidance and communications materials)

working with local leaders and care home workers who have already been vaccinated to provide advice and information to

their co workers and local community

content in different languages and briefings with different faith groups who have expressed interest in co-creating vaccine content and acting as ambassadors

We continue to work with stakeholders to identify further actions at a local, regional and national level to increase vaccine uptake. As part of this, we are targeting support to older adult care homes where vaccine uptake is low, such as in London.

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