

Vaccination as a Condition of Deployment (VCOD) for all Healthcare Workers

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) formally announced on 9 November 2021 that NHS staff in England with patient contact, regardless of their employer (including primary and secondary care), must be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 to protect patients. It is expected to come into effect 1 April 2022, subject to the parliamentary process.

The NHS Health at Work Network (the Network) recognises that the NHS are still awaiting the details within the Department for Health and Social Care Code of Practice, but are aware that Trusts and NHS Provider organisations are starting to make their own local plans with regards to the potential impact on staffing and service delivery.

In support of its' membership, this briefing note is intended to suggest some of the areas for early consideration. It is recognised that the delivery of the covid vaccination programme within Trusts has been different across the country and as such a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate for OH.

Data

The Network is conscious that the data-set may not be the responsibility, or sole responsibility, of the OH Service. For those organisations that have a separate Covid vaccine team which is managed by other areas of the Trust, then Trust managers may have direct access to the data held within the National Point of Care systems (NIVS / NIMS etc.) without the need to link in with OH. Some OH Services have had responsibility for the delivery of this vaccine programme and so are holding this data, whilst others have a hybrid model (OH involvement linked to another team).

From the advice we have received, we would advise that if you have full or part responsibility for the COVID-19 vaccination data, until further national guidance is available, you should consider only sharing high-level data-sets with your organisations (e.g. percentage uptake by staff groups, departments, etc.). This will help your organisation to start to understand any risk areas or risk staff groups, whilst maintaining confidentiality. Non-OH managers who have access to the detailed data should consider common law obligations with respect to confidentiality, and it is suggested that further national guidance is awaited before any data sharing occurs.

Encouragement / Supportive Conversations

With the benefit of the above high-level data sets, Trust managers can have supportive conversations with all staff to encourage vaccine uptake, without the detailed knowledge of exactly who has not yet had the vaccine. This approach is designed to encourage staff to confidentially reach out to OH for further advice, information and to understand their options. OH teams may also be able to advise on issues such as medical exemption, HR on redeployment and Chaplaincy teams on concerns regarding religious beliefs and vaccination. It is hoped that the guidance will provide some steer on these requirements.

Future Work

Future national guidance is expected to consider the definition of 'frontline'/patient-facing roles, job adverts and conditions of employment, and new starter OH health screening processes. It will also be necessary for OH teams to consider how any national guidance will impact on healthcare students, agency staff, volunteers, visiting staff, etc.

If you wish to share what you are doing in your own Trust or region, or want to find out how this is being managed locally, you can find the contact details for your regional Network Board representative at <https://www.nhshealthatwork.co.uk/how-we-operate.asp>

Hilary Winch
Network Chair

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