**Making vaccination a condition of deployment in the health and wider social care sector**

**Royal Pharmaceutical Society response**

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) is the professional body for pharmacists in Great Britain. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and would like to thank the department of health and social care for the vaccination as a condition of deployment roundtable in October 2021.

### **1.Which of the following best describes your opinion of the requirement: Those deployed to undertake direct treatment or personal care as part of a CQC regulated activity in a healthcare or social care setting (including in someone’s home) must have a COVID-19 and flu vaccination?**

1. **Must have a Covid-19 vaccination in healthcare**

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

**Please provide details to support your answer (maximum 500 words)**

Healthcare teams, including pharmacists and their teams, continue to play a critical role in the delivery of both COVID and flu vaccinations and supporting the public throughout the pandemic.

The RPS actively and strongly encourages all pharmacists to take advantage of the Covid-19 vaccination programme and to get vaccinated unless there is a medical reason why they are unable to.

All members of the pharmacy team should have any vaccine deemed necessary to help protect themselves, their patients and the wider community. We consider this to be best practice and part of pharmacists professional responsibility within [the GPhC standards for pharmacy professionals](https://www.pharmacyregulation.org/sites/default/files/standards_for_pharmacy_professionals_may_2017_0.pdf) where pharmacists should make the care of the patient their first concern and act in their best interests.

We do not agree with making Covid-19 vaccinations mandatory, as informed and educated choices about health interventions would be more beneficial long-term than enforcing them. Currently 92 % of NHS staff have received their first dose of Covid-19 vaccine and 89% have received their second dose (as of 28 September 2021).

Clear guidance needs to be given to employers as to what they are to do regarding a pharmacist's eligibility to work if they choose not to be vaccinated. In order to minimise risks to patients and colleagues we would expect that unvaccinated pharmacists take steps to make sure that they minimise risks, including a discission with their employer, risk assessment and infection prevention measures. We would welcome strong guidance from the Department of Health to provide consistency of approach for employers who have staff who choose not to be vaccinated.

We recognise this is a topic that splits opinion due to professional and ethical considerations. We surveyed our membership and pharmacy technicians in October 2021 to get a snapshot view of their opinions on the topic. Of the 2211 responses 53% supported mandatory vaccination and 47% did not support making covid vaccination mandatory. There was no overwhelming majority either way\*[[1]](#footnote-1).

In light of these results, further engagement with the profession and other considerations including the unintended consequence of enforcing vaccination we believe that our [current position statement](https://www.rpharms.com/recognition/all-our-campaigns/policy-a-z/covid-19-vaccinations-for-pharmacists) is applicable.

Making Covid-19 vaccination a condition of deployment could result in a number of unintended consequences such as:

* The G[reen Book chapter on consent](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consent-the-green-book-chapter-2) clearly states *'the rights of individuals to decide what happens to their own bodies and consent is a fundamental principle of good healthcare and professional practice’.* Getting consent from a person who is unhappy to have the vaccine raises concerns around consent for both the patient and the vaccinator.
* If health and care staff do not wish to be vaccinated and can no longer undertake their daily work this could have a significant impact on patient safety and patient care. This is likely to have an impact on access to health and care services across primary and secondary care as well as community services.
* There are currently issues around covid-19 vaccine uptake in terms of demographics and these proposals could lead to potential discrimination and inequalities in the workforce, particularly with people from some ethnic minorities and socioeconomic backgrounds.
* Many health and care professionals are already experiencing mental health issues and extreme workforce pressures. Being mandated to have a vaccine, or the effect on other members of their teams, could add to those pressures.
* Employers will be required to collect and process data on vaccination status, and this could impact significantly on workload.
* The more deprived areas could potentially be the hardest hit, as those living and working in these areas are least likely to be vaccinated. This could mean that health and care staff working in deprived areas are less likely to get vaccinated so the provision of care in these areas will be reduced.

1. **Must have a COVID-19 vaccination in social care**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/aa314942-528a-412d-98a1-e54a9b643f1c)

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

**Please provide details to support your answer (maximum 500 words)**

Our arguments are set out above and in our position statement <https://www.rpharms.com/recognition/all-our-campaigns/policy-a-z/covid-19-vaccinations-for-pharmacists>

1. **Must have a Flu vaccination in healthcare**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/aa314942-528a-412d-98a1-e54a9b643f1c)

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

**Please provide details to support your answer (maximum 500 words)**

We do not agree with making flu vaccinations mandatory, as informed and educated choices about health interventions would be more beneficial long-term than enforcing them.

We are pleased to see that for the first time this year, pharmacists and their teams across primary care are also eligible to receive flu vaccinations free of charge, whereas in the past they had to pay for them. The fact that free flu vaccinations have been made freely available may naturally increase uptake amongst the pharmacy profession.

1. **Must have a Flu vaccination in social care**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/aa314942-528a-412d-98a1-e54a9b643f1c)

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

**Please provide details to support your answer (maximum 500 words)**

Our arguments are set out above.

**2. Do you think there are people deployed in or visiting a healthcare or social care setting (including someone’s home) who do not undertake direct treatment or personal care as part of a CQC regulated activity but should also be included within the scope of a requirement to have a COVID-19 and flu vaccine?**

***1.Yes 2. No 3. Don’t know***

As we do not agree with mandatory vaccination of health or social care staff we do not believe that any other people should be included within the scope of this requirement.

However, were this policy to be implemented there would be an issue in relation to community pharmacies. Community pharmacy premises are regulated by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) and not by CQC, so unless they provide CQC regulated activity, they would not be within the scope of this consultation. This could lead to a number of issues:

* Community pharmacy could be perceived as an outlier and potentially a higher risk environment by members of the public / patients, and this would have a significant impact on patient care and public health services as people would not be accessing the care that they needed. This would also impact on other primary care providers, such as general practice, as people may turn to their GP if they don’t want to see the community pharmacist.
* There would be an inconsistency in messaging to both the pharmacy profession and the public, as those community pharmacies who provide CQC regulated activity would be within scope. This would mean that some community pharmacies would be required to have vaccinated staff whilst other would not.
* There would potentially be a perception of unfairness and unequitable treatment across NHS care / services
* Pressure could be put on community pharmacists and their staff to show their vaccination status. This could increase work pressures on an already stretched workforce
* If community pharmacies were to be included within the scope of this proposal, then conversations with employers would be critical as the pharmacy premises is often part of a wider retail environment.
* The pharmacy team is made up of a range of staff, some who provide medicines delivery and other domiciliary services. There may be an issue if all such staff need to be vaccinated and this could impact on patient care as the provision of these services could decrease.

### **3. For COVID-19 and flu vaccination are there people deployed to undertake direct treatment or personal care as part of a CQC regulated activity that should not be in scope of the policy?**

1. **COVID-19 vaccination**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/5f806737-7a9f-47b3-9b86-eed9a36b1706)

***1.Yes 2. No 3. Don’t know***

**Please explain your answer (maximum 500 words)**

We do not believe that anyone working in health and social care should be mandated to have the covid-19 vaccination, therefore nobody should be within the scope of this policy.

1. **Flu vaccination**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/5f806737-7a9f-47b3-9b86-eed9a36b1706)

***1.Yes 2. No 3. Don’t know***

**Please explain your answer (maximum 500 words)**

As above

**4. Are there any other health and social care settings where an approach similar to adult care homes should be taken? (that is, all those working or volunteering in the care home must have a COVID-19 vaccination or have an exemption)**

***1.Yes 2.No. 3.No opinion***

We do not agree with either covid-19 or flu vaccinations being mandatory for any health and social care staff in any care settings. However, we do believe that employees should inform their employer if they have not been vaccinated.

Within many health and care settings there are a number of staff, including for example delivery drivers who deliver medicines to patients from their pharmacy, who have direct contact with patients who are not currently covered within the scope of the proposals.

### **5. Which of the following best describes your opinion of the requirement: Those under the age of 18, undertaking direct treatment or personal care as part of a CQC regulated activity (in a healthcare or social care setting, including in someone’s home), must have a COVID-19 and flu vaccination?**

1. **COVID-19 vaccination in healthcare**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/d7184fa7-4d22-482e-8891-06de05edcf28)

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

**Please provide details to support your answer (maximum 500 words)**

Please see our arguments above

1. **COVID-19 vaccination in social care \***

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

**Please provide details to support your answer (maximum 500 words)**

Please see our arguments above

1. **Flu vaccination in healthcare**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/d7184fa7-4d22-482e-8891-06de05edcf28)

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

**Please provide details to support your answer (maximum 500 words)**

Please see our arguments above

1. **Flu vaccination in social care**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/d7184fa7-4d22-482e-8891-06de05edcf28)

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

**Please provide details to support your answer (maximum 500 words)**

Please see our arguments above

### **6. Do you agree or disagree that exemption from COVID-19 vaccination and flu vaccination should only be based on medical grounds?**

1. **COVID-19 vaccination**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/693b9258-e69f-4843-a2f1-b8a5ce16c649)

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

Mandating vaccination could potentially stimulate a backlash and is unlikely to improve already strong uptake rates. Health and social care workers are generally very conscious of the evidence-base and will be able to assess the situation themselves.

1. **Flu vaccination**

***1.Supportive 2. Slightly supportive 3. Neither supportive or unsupportive 4. Unsupportive 5. Don’t know***

As above

**7. On what other basis, if any, should a person be exempt from COVID-19 vaccination requirements? (maximum 500 words)**

We have no comment on this question.

**8. On what other basis, if any, should a person be exempt from Flu vaccination requirements?**

We have no comment on this question.

**9. Are there particular groups of people, such as those with protected characteristics, who would particularly benefit from COVID-19 vaccination and flu vaccination being a condition of deployment in healthcare and social care?**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/a7a5fe12-667a-42ed-b9f8-4a489239d79b)

***1.Yes 2.No 3.Unsure***

Adequate PPE, adequate ventilation, social distancing and hygiene can reduce the transmission of both covid-19 and flu and health and care settings should ensure they have adequate measures in place. There is also the possibility that because people are vaccinated, they no longer take adequate precautions such as wearing face masks and regular hand washing, thereby increasing the risk of transmission.

**10.Are there particular groups of people, such as those with protected characteristics, who would be particularly negatively affected by COVID-19 and flu vaccination being a condition of deployment in healthcare and social care?**

***1.Yes 2. No 3.Unsure***

**11. Which particular groups might be negatively impacted and why? (maximum 500 words)**

**12. Do you think a vaccination requirement policy could cause any conflict with other statutory requirements that healthcare or social care providers must meet?**[**\***](https://consultations.dhsc.gov.uk/612f51cbbf327c44607a7bb9/394020d6-1df4-4f30-a1c8-cb63870bf08c/faedaa8f-f15c-4627-8172-cdb4b15adb4a)

***1.Yes. 2.No. 3. Don’t Know 4. Not applicable***

Other vaccinations that healthcare staff are required to have are not mandated in law, rather they are part of occupational health or health and safety requirements. We believe that covid-19 and flu vaccination should be treated in the same way and should be offered as part of working for the NHS with supportive engagement and education on why this is important

**12.What could the government do to encourage those working in unregulated roles to have the COVID-19 and flu vaccine? (maximum 500 words)**

There are several things that the government can do to promote uptake of vaccinations:

* Ongoing promotion of the benefits of being vaccinated and targeted to groups that are currently not taking up vaccinations
* Targeted emails to vulnerable health and care staff
* Supporting line managers and employers to have conversations about vaccinations
* Enabling access to clinicians for those who have questions around safety and efficacy of vaccinations
* Making vaccinations accessible outside of working hours
* Making vaccinations free of charge to all frontline health and social care staff
* Strong messages about responsibilities to patients and duty of care

We are aware that some of this is happening already

**13. We would welcome any comments you may have relating to Annex B - proposed addition to the code of practice – criterion 10. (maximum 500 words)**

These proposals would increase the workload for pharmacy teams and employers.

**14. We welcome any further comments you may have relating to this consultation (maximum 500 words)**

Current requirements for hepatitis B vaccination and for staff in paediatric wards or those working with vulnerable patients to be vaccinated against, or have natural immunity to measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox are not requirements that are specifically mandated by law. They are occupational health and/or health and safety requirements. Using legislation to require healthcare workers to be vaccinated would be a step further than we have gone before and could generate a strong backlash.

The Covid-19 vaccine is an important tool in protecting people from the virus and helping to get life back to normal. These vaccines have undergone extensive testing and are safe and effective to use. We will continue to monitor any evidence relating to Covid-19 vaccinations and provide relevant advice to our membership and the pharmacy profession.

Vaccination is a key pillar in infection control and disease prevention. Regular lateral flow testing of front-line staff is also important in the fight against Covid-19. We expect all pharmacists working in patient facing roles to undertake such tests and to act in accordance with the results. We also expect pharmacists and their teams to be provided with adequate PPE that enables them to undertake their roles effectively and safely.

It is important that all health and care professionals and staff continue to have access to Covid-19 vaccinations and take up the offer when asked, however, we do not believe that covid-19 vaccination should be made a requirement of deployment for any health or social care professional.

An impact assessment should be undertaken and made publicly available to assess the impact of the proposals outlined in this consultation on both health and care staff as well as patient care.

1. *\*RPS and APTUK held a member survey for 2 weeks. Of the 2211 respondents, 186 (8%) were from pharmacy technicians. In terms of Covid vaccination 53% said it should be mandatory, 31% strongly encouraged and 16% optional In terms of flu vaccinations 36% said it should be mandatory, 44% strongly encouraged and 20% optional.*

   *The respondents to the survey are just a small subset of a total workforce population of over 80,000. Therefore, our approach in terms of mandating covid-19 or flu vaccinations is aligned with that of other professional leadership bodies. We do not agree with making vaccinations a condition of deployment but would strongly encourage all health and social care staff to be vaccinated.* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)