



GMB union - response to Department for Health & Social Care Consultation on Revoking Vaccination as a Condition of Deployment across all health and social care

16th February 2022

Online form submissions

It is a statutory requirement that CQC-registered persons only permit those individuals who are vaccinated against Covid-19, unless otherwise exempt:

1. To be deployed for the provision of a CQC-regulated activity in health and/or social care and;
2. To enter CQC-registered care home premises.

Which of the following best describes your preference for this requirement?

I FEEL STRONGLY THAT THE REQUIREMENT SHOULD BE REVOKED

Thinking about yourself, your colleagues, your staff or care providers who are hesitant to get vaccinated, do you believe there are other steps (other than those set out in the original consultation) the government and the health and care sector could take to increase vaccine uptake?

YES

If yes, what specific actions do you believe government and the health and social care sector should be taking to further increase the vaccine uptake?

GMB union are opposed to legally enforced medical procedures as a condition of employment. As stated previously in the two consultations already conducted on this issue in health and social care - we believe mandating workers to have the Covid-19 vaccine signals a heavy-handed and rudimentary approach from government.

Instead, other more holistic approaches should be fully explored and implemented, including understanding and addressing many of the underlying reasons for vaccine hesitancy amongst a relatively small portion of the health and social care workforce.

Many GMB members who were vaccine hesitant reported to us their genuine fears over the safety of the vaccine and had concerns about potential long-term effects. A lot

more could and should have been done to assist these workers in accessing support in discussing their concerns.

Other reasons for individuals not accessing the vaccine, particularly in social care, which were not addressed sufficiently were accessibility. Workers having to travel to vaccination centres after 12 hour shifts, or on their rest days acted as a deterrent. As did travel costs and the fears of side effects which may result in people having to take sick leave without pay. Paid time off to get the vaccine and a guarantee of sick pay if side effects are experienced would have helped.

GMB union insisted from the start of these consultation that the government needed to take a different approach and not impose mandatory vaccines and instead look at alternative ways of increasing uptake. Government must ensure public health support services are in place to have a genuine dialogue around concerns. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all managed to address staff concerns and increase vaccine uptake without resorting to legislative mandates.

The Government did not do enough to understand and address the many varied reasons for vaccine hesitancy. They ignored concerns raised with them by trade unions, care providers, NHS employers and health and care workers themselves. The repercussions are clear to see from the thousands that have already left social care.

Are there particular groups of people, such as those with protected characteristics, who would be particularly negatively affected by a Covid-19 vaccination not being a condition of deployment in healthcare and social care?

N/A

Are there particular groups of people, such as those with protected characteristics, who would particularly benefit from a Covid-19 vaccination not being a condition of deployment in healthcare and social care?

YES

If yes, which particular groups might be positively impacted and why?

In a recent GMB survey for the previous consultation submission, 34% of respondents raised concerns about potential negative impacts on workers with protected characteristics.

Younger workers felt they did not need the vaccine as they were the least vulnerable to Covid-19. More communication and advice could be distributed to this section of the workforce.

Black Asian and Minority Ethnic workers - It has been well documented throughout the pandemic that vaccine hesitancy is more prominent amongst this group of workers. Significantly in London, where vaccine take up is lowest in the profession, there is a considerable proportion of the workforce from Black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds compared to other regions of England or the UK. Mandating vaccination could potentially mean direct or indirect discrimination.

Women - those who may be considering starting a family have expressed concerns about the vaccines potential impact on their fertility. Pregnant women also continue to have concerns regarding the safety of the vaccine. Information issued at the start of the pandemic advising them not to take the vaccine have stayed in people's minds. Therefore, even though pregnant women are now being advised to take the vaccine, many still do not feel safe to do so and have genuine concerns for the health of their unborn babies. Also, in social care, the workforce is predominantly female, therefore this causes a bigger issue for women in comparison to more male dominated professions. 82% of the adult social care workforce are women.

Disability - some may be vulnerable to potential side effects resulting from the vaccines.

GMB has collated a few impact statements from health and social care workers who have been impacted because of this Government policy.

MEMBER QUOTES

Care Worker - "My employment was terminated after 28 years' service and I am now left living on universal credits, living in poverty. I am looking for alternative work but struggling due to my poor mental and physical health. I feel absolutely let down by how we've been treated."

Staff Nurse (Care) - "I do not wish to be vaccinated so had to leave my job as I was a Staff Nurse in a nursing home. I did manage to get another job but had to work more hours for a lot less pay."

Care Home Manager - "Staff want choice. No choice - have the job or lose your job. Many staff chose to move away from care altogether. This made recruitment very difficult and the knock-on effect is to use agency workers who are very costly. This is a not-for-profit organisation. Fees will have to increase to cover the extra costs. We are not admitting residents as I cannot guarantee care. So, we are in effect bed blocking. I have never known a time as difficult as this in the care industry."

Nurse - "The process of implementation and then revoking the legislation has wasted immense amounts of senior management resources and time at a time when efforts should have been focussed on the pandemic and service pressures. People have been alienated and distressed at a time when many were already suffering mental health problems after having worked through the pandemic and then being told they would be no longer welcome in the NHS after April."

Ambulance Technician - "The government rushed into this with no thought to the impact on staff who were already worn down and beat."

Paramedic - "Government should have listened to staff in previous consultations. Please listen to us this time and scrap this law."

What actions can the government and the health and social care sectors take to protect those with protected characteristics, or the groups you've identified, if Covid-19 vaccination is not a condition of deployment?

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GMB believes that Government focus should be on ensuring Covid-19 risk factors are managed through risk assessments and ensuring testing, social distancing and ventilation measures continue to be in place as well as a more comprehensive approach to persuading the public, including health and social care workers to take the vaccine.

We also believe regarding older adult residential care where the workforce had the mandatory vaccination policy imposed in November 2021 that Government should issue updated guidance to providers firstly to ensure providers are aware of this change in Government policy and are encouraged to change employment practises to reflect this change. But further still to ensure that they proactively contact those workers that lost their jobs because of the policy and where applicable ensure these former employees are offered their role or similar back.