



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP  
Minister of State for Care*

*39 Victoria Street  
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25th February 2021

Dear Prime Minister

I am writing to update you on the vaccination of care home staff and the steps we are taking to increase uptake. In the last couple of weeks the rate at which we're seeing staff vaccinated has slowed, following the end of the initial round of visits to care homes. That said, since we have given social care workers access to the national booking system we have had over 130,000 book appointments.

The update below sets out the situation and the work we are doing. The immediate priority is to drive forwards work to support care home workers to get vaccinated, while doing the groundwork for a stronger approach if uptake falls short of the level needed to protect care home residents. The upcoming externally led review of vaccine certification will inform our decisions on whether a stronger approach is required.

Yours

**Personal Data**

**HELEN WHATELY**

## **UPDATE ON THE VACCINATION OF CARE HOME STAFF**

### **Current situation**

As of 23 February 72% of care home staff who can be vaccinated have been (and 70% in total). This compares to 94% of eligible care home residents (90% in total). The reasons for the difference between residents and staff include: some staff will not have been working when the first dose was offered (around a quarter), others were ineligible because they tested positive in the last 28 days and some will be pregnant or planning to conceive. The evidence we have gathered so far suggests 6-8% of staff have refused.

### **Our ambition**

We want to give care home residents as much protection from Covid as possible. Whilst we are still in early days in our understanding of the effectiveness of vaccines, current advice from PHE and the SAGE Social Care Working Group is that a take up rate of 80% in staff and 90% in residents in each individual care home setting would provide a minimum level of protection against Covid-19.

We estimate at around 5% of staff won't have the vaccine because of pregnancy or clinical reasons.

This suggests we must achieve a minimum of 80% of care home staff being vaccinated while working towards much more than this (but recognising we won't be able to get to 100%).

### **Ensuring access to vaccination**

Firstly we need to make it easy for care workers to be vaccinated, recognising many work long hours on low pay and rely on public transport. The best way to do this is to return to care homes and offer staff vaccinations at work.

Some staff were not offered the vaccine during the first visit due to limited supply or shift patterns. Employers also report those who refused the vaccine during the initial visit have subsequently agreed to be vaccinated – but many care homes have not had a second visit yet.

NHSE&I are working on a programme of follow-up visits to care homes, with each care home due to have a minimum schedule of four visits (two to administer the first dose and two to administer the second dose). We are asking all NHS CCGs and Primary Care Networks to ensure that all care homes, with staff or residents still to be vaccinated, have had a second visit by the end of March, so we can be sure that all care home staff have been given an opportunity to be vaccinated at work.

In parallel, we are urging employers to get their workers to book in for vaccination via the national booking service, which opened up to care home staff on 11 February, or their local GP. We have emailed all care homes with clear guidance on this, and have sent follow-up emails to those with the lowest staff vaccination rates. Our Covid-funding can be used by care homes to cover costs of staff getting vaccinated.

### **Addressing fear and hesitancy**

Some staff are reticent about being vaccinated, others are worried or genuinely frightened. 'Intent to take the vaccine' is lower amongst women, BAME communities and people under 55. These groups make up a significant proportion of the care home workforce.

Anecdotally, younger women are worried about its impact on fertility and some BAME communities are particularly worried about Pfizer due to its historic legacy.

An extensive programme of work is underway to address fears about vaccination. This includes webinars for the care sector, educational materials sent to providers and the broader work to build trust amongst hesitant communities. We have shared blogs and videos of social care workers from BAME communities receiving the vaccine, explaining how they have overcome their own vaccine hesitancy and why they would encourage their colleagues to be vaccinated. The consistent message is that staff are most likely to be reassured by respected colleagues.