# COVID-19 Immunisation Policy for Care Homes

## Introduction

In January 2021, the UK government commenced a nationwide coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccination programme and encouraged all eligible persons to be immunised in order to reduce the spread of the infection throughout the population and to ensure that all vulnerable groups – including older people, pregnant women and those with underlying health conditions – are protected wherever possible.

COVID-19 vaccinations have been approved for use in the UK. At the time of writing, vaccination has been offered to all adults in the UK.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, care homes have been hit particularly badly in terms of illness and deaths, primarily due to the vulnerability of the service users within them. In an attempt to reduce the risk to care homes posed by COVID-19, the government has introduced legislation that will make it compulsory in England for anyone entering a care home setting (subject to a few exceptions) to be fully vaccinated.

## Company policy

From 11 November 2021, anyone entering a care home will be required to provide evidence that:

* They have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 (i.e. received both doses) with an approved vaccine;
* They are medically exempt from vaccination; or
* They fall within one of the other exemptions within the new rules, e.g. they are under 18.

A failure to comply with the above will result in you not being able to enter the care home, which in turn may result in you not being able to carry out your duties.

The above requirements will be in addition to any other health and safety measures that are in place to reduce the risk of COVID-19 to all workers, visitors, and residents. Our risk assessment can be found [insert where].

## Vaccine information

There is lots of information about the vaccines available online, a number of which can be found in the [government’s operational guidance document](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaccination-of-people-working-or-deployed-in-care-homes-operational-guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-vaccination-of-people-working-or-deployed-in-care-homes-operational-guidance#introduction).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the vaccine, including safety information, please speak to [NAME], or contact your GP.

## The Company’s responsibilities

The Company recognises its duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 to protect, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its staff.

[Our risk assessments have identified that some of our staff may be exposed to COVID-19 in the course of their work and should be appropriately protected.]

[We also have a responsibility to reduce the risk of infection to our service users.]

[NAME/TITLE] will have overall responsibility for this policy, which will be reviewed whenever government guidance changes or as indicated by the policy review date.

## Your responsibilities

If your role requires you to enter the care home premises, then you will be required to provide evidence to the CQC Registered Person[, [NAME],] (or to whomever has been assigned this role) that you have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or that you are medically exempt from being vaccinated. A failure to do so may result in you being unable to carry out your role which, as a result, could lead to a variation of your role or dismissal.

The Company is committed to ensuring that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the way in which we treat our staff reflects their individual needs and does not discriminate against individuals or groups on any grounds of any protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. In the event that you are not able to participate in the vaccination programme for any reason, you should discuss your circumstances with [NAME/TITLE].

The Company has and will continue to take all other reasonable steps to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission, including a regular review of the control measures in the workplace and the provision of appropriate PPE. Immunisation is not regarded as a substitute for other precautionary steps at this present moment.

Staff are expected to follow and adhere to safe working practices to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

All employees must follow the guidelines promoted by Public Health England, the NHS and the World Health Organisation on infection control whilst at work and in their daily lives and comply with the provisions of our Coronavirus (COVID-19) Policy.

## Time off for vaccination

If you are invited to have your first and/or second dose of the vaccine during normal working hours, you are entitled to take [paid] time off work to attend your vaccination appointment.

You should inform the Company as soon as possible of the time and date of any appointment. [You should, if asked to do so, provide proof of the appointment, e.g. the letter from the NHS confirming your vaccination appointment or a screenshot of the text message you have received.]

[If you are able to book a vaccination appointment, please try to arrange for it to take place at the beginning or end of the working day where possible.]

## Time off for vaccination side effects

You may experience some side effects after your vaccination. If you are not well enough to work due to the side effects of Coronavirus vaccination:

* You will be entitled [to statutory sick pay, provided the usual requirements are met OR to Company sick pay in accordance with the Company’s [sickness and attendance policy] OR exceptionally to receive your normal pay in respect of up to [insert number] days’ absence];
* These absences will not count in absence records or towards HR 'trigger' points in the Company’s [insert details, e.g. sickness and attendance procedure].

## Evidence of vaccination status and medical exemption

There are limited forms of documentation that will suffice as evidence of vaccination or medical exemption status.

## **Vaccination status**

If you have been fully vaccinated in England, there are three forms of evidence that will be accepted:

* The [NHS App](https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/nhs-app/)
* The [NHS website](http://www.nhs.uk)
* The [NHS COVID Pass letter](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-pass/get-your-covid-pass-letter/)

If you have been fully vaccinated in Scotland, Wales, or anywhere else, then speak to [NAME], who will be able to discuss this further with you.

## **Medical exemption**

There are a range of circumstances in which an exemption may be granted which will reflect the [Green Book on Immunisation against infectious disease, chapter 14a](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-the-green-book-chapter-14a) and clinical advice from the Joint Committee of Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

It will be necessary for individuals who are medically exempt to evidence this through the NHS COVID Pass. Details regarding this can be found on the government website or from [NAME]. In addition, until and including 24 December 2021, it is possible for individuals to self-certify that they are medically exempt. Details of what medical conditions will entitle you to be exempt from vaccination can again be found on the government website or from [NAME].

If you do self-certify, we will require you to do so using the official government exemption certificate, and we may inquire as to the medical reasons in order to see if you fall within one of the medical exemptions currently listed. This self-certificate will be valid until and including on 31 March 2022. Once your certificate expires, you must either obtain an exemption certificate though the NHS COVID Pass process or be fully vaccinated in order to enter the home.

Please note that it can take several weeks for an exemption confirmation to be processed, particularly given the current pressures being placed on the NHS. It is your responsibility to ensure that you give yourself enough time in order to be able to comply with these requirements. A failure to do so could result in you being unable to work in accordance with your Contract of Employment.

The position is slightly different if you are pregnant and are claiming medical exemption from vaccination. In this case, you can rely on your MAT B1 form. This will expire 16 weeks postpartum, at which point you must either obtain an exemption certificate through the NHS COVID Pass process or be fully vaccinated in order to enter the home.

If you provide false information regarding your medical exemption status, you may be disciplined. If you believe you are medically exempt, then speak to [NAME].

If you are medically exempt from vaccination, it will be necessary for us to carry out a separate risk assessment to ensure that it is safe for you to continue working in your role. This will include considering whether variations need to be made to your role, whether additional measures can be put in place to protect you and others, and whether there are alternative roles for you. We will consult fully with you before any decision is made in respect of your role.

## Failure to provide information and evidence of vaccination or medical exemption status

From 11 November 2021, if you cannot provide evidence that you have been fully vaccinated, are medically exempt from vaccination, or fall within another exemption, you will not be allowed to enter the care home premises.

In order to plan ahead for the introduction of this new measure, we may request information from you regarding your current vaccination status, whether you are medically exempt, and if you are not vaccinated, whether you intend to do so. If you fail to provide this information when requested, then a decision regarding your role will have to be taken based on the information available to us at that time, which could result in the variation of your role or dismissal if you are unable to continue to carry out your duties.

If you cannot or will not comply with the requirement to provide evidence of vaccination or medical exemption status, and this will affect your ability to carry out your duties, then it will be necessary to consider:

* Whether your role can be varied so that you do not have to enter the care home;
* Whether there are alternative roles that you could undertake; and
* Whether your employment should be terminated.

Termination of employment will be a last resort, but if no alternatives can be found and you are unable to carry out your duties, then dismissal will be the likely result.

## Data protection

Information relating to an individual’s vaccination is health information, i.e. special category data. We may need to process such information to record:

* [Any time off you take[ and to process your pay for time off] to get the vaccine;]
* [Any time off you take[ and to process your pay for time off] due to side effects of the vaccine;]
* Who has received their first[ and second] vaccine; and
* Who is medically exempt from vaccination.

Any such processing will take place in accordance with the Company’s [data protection policy and data protection privacy notice].