

COVID-19 Vaccinations Policy



This document forms part of Somerset County Council's HR&OD Policies and Procedures.

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1. What the policy covers

The government is currently rolling out its national COVID-19 vaccination programme. This policy sets out the Council's stance on employees being vaccinated against COVID-19 and how the vaccination programme impacts the Council's workforce.

This policy will remain under review in line with updated guidance from the government and other relevant professional associations.

2. Principles

The Council will communicate accurate information, in line with guidance from the government and other professional associations, on the COVID-19 vaccines to all staff and will continue to provide this as and when guidance is updated.

The Council strongly recommends and encourages all staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccinations when they become eligible.

This policy should be used in conjunction with the Council's [Sickness Absence Management policy](#), [Dignity at Work Code of Practice](#) and [Grievance Procedure](#) where appropriate.

3. Responsibilities

Managers are responsible for:

- Encouraging all staff to receive the COVID-19 vaccinations once eligible.

- Supporting the dispelling of misinformation and communication of accurate information from official and reliable sources on the COVID-19 vaccines to staff.
- Exploring with staff who are hesitant around receiving the vaccines, their reasons for hesitancy, and ensuring they are signposted to the appropriate accurate information from official and reliable sources to be able to make an informed decision.
- Ensuring risk assessments are completed and updated with staff as and when appropriate.

Employees are responsible for:

- Being aware of misinformation around COVID-19 vaccinations and keeping themselves well informed and up to date with accurate information from official and reliable sources.
- Ensuring they take reasonable care for their own health and safety.
- Ensure they treat others with dignity and respect in line with this policy and the Council's [Dignity at Work Code of Practice](#).

4. Policy in practice

4.1 COVID-19 Vaccination Programme

Vaccinations are free of charge on the NHS. They are being administered according to a priority list at vaccination centres, including some hospitals, sports stadiums, conference centres and GP surgeries.

The Council encourages employees who are not registered with a GP to do so as soon as they can. See www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery for information on how to do this.

4.2 Individual's Decision

The Council asks that, when a COVID-19 vaccination becomes available, employees take the opportunity to be vaccinated. The Council understands that this is ultimately each individual's choice, but we encourage our workforce to make an informed decision by:

- reading up about COVID-19 vaccinations via official sources.
- paying attention to the information the NHS provides when offering a vaccine; and
- being wary of misinformation around COVID-19 vaccinations put out by unreliable sources.

However, the Council recognises that some employees may be unwilling or hesitant to have the COVID-19 vaccinations and this is their personal choice.

4.3 Frontline Staff

There are additional considerations in some of the Council's service areas such as those employees working in frontline roles who may be more likely to be exposed to COVID-19 and or may come into contact with vulnerable service users as part of their work.

Catching COVID-19 can be serious and may lead to long term complications. These are more common in older people or those with underlying clinical risk factors.

You can have COVID-19 without any symptoms and pass it on to work colleagues or service users, some of whom may be at increased risk from COVID-19. Being healthy doesn't reduce your risk of catching COVID-19 or passing it on.

The Government has published specific COVID-19 vaccination guidance for: [healthcare workers](#); and [social care staff](#).

The government guidance focuses on setting out the benefits for health and social care staff in being vaccinated against COVID-19.

4.4 Risk Assessments

The Council encourages employees to get vaccinated once they become entitled to it. Existing COVID-19 risk assessments should be updated to refer to being vaccinated.

Considerations when carrying out risk assessments include:

Those who have not yet had, or unable to have their COVID-19 vaccinations for example, those who have not yet been invited for their vaccinations, who are pregnant or those with an allergic response etc.

The potential for individual employees to choose not to have their vaccinations. The type of role an individual fulfils.

COVID-19 secure measures could include; continued working from home, social distancing, use of PPE, handwashing and so on. This is not an exhaustive list and individual circumstances should be considered on a case-by-case basis.

Risk assessments should be continually reviewed and updated in line with any changes in guidance from the government or other professional associations, to include and reflect the availability of the vaccine to different groups. All risk assessments should be dated. Risk Assessment templates can be found on the [COVID-19 Staff Information site](#).

4.5 Time off for Vaccination Appointments

Employees can take reasonable paid time off, to travel to and from and attend, their COVID-19 vaccination appointments under the medical appointments section of the Sickness Absence Management policy.

Employees should inform their line manager with reasonable advance notice of taking time off to attend COVID-19 vaccination appointments.

The Council supports those who are taking part in a trial COVID-19 vaccination programme and therefore paid time off to participate in such trials will also be provided in line with the medical appointments section of the Sickness Absence Management policy.

4.6 Return to Work following Vaccination Appointments

Following a vaccination, employees should be able to resume their normal activities, including working, as long as they feel well.

This means that employees should return to work as soon as they can after their vaccination appointment. If it is not practical for the employee to return to work immediately after their appointment, for example if it is towards the end of their working day, they should discuss with their line manager.

Vaccine side effects for most people are very minimal, if at all, i.e. sore arm, mild cold symptoms etc. Very few people experience side effects to the vaccines that will make them unwell for work.

Where an employee feels unwell and unable to work as a result of receiving a COVID-19 vaccination, this absence will be excluded from the employee's sickness absence count and full contractual pay will continue to be received.

This absence should still be reported in line with the Council's [Sickness Absence Management Policy](#) and employees should notify their line manager by telephone as soon as reasonably practicable, preferably before they are due to start work. Managers should record such absence via MSS on SAP using code 'COVID19 Vaccine React'.

4.7 Treating Colleagues with Respect

The Council recognises that the subject of the COVID-19 vaccination programme can lead to the expression of differing opinions. However, all staff must remain responsible and respectful when communicating with their colleagues about COVID-19 vaccinations.

Employees must not act against colleagues in a way that could amount to bullying or harassment, for example mocking a colleague's views on COVID-19 vaccinations or foisting their own views on COVID-19 vaccinations on others.

For example, the harassment or intimidation of colleagues because of their views or individual circumstances may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal. Please refer to the [Dignity at Work Code of Practice](#).

Any employee who is offended by, or concerned about, a colleague's behaviour in this regard should raise the matter with management in the first instance in a view to try to resolve the matter informally. Where the concern is unable to be resolved informally i.e. all appropriate informal routes have been exhausted or an informal route is not appropriate due to the serious nature of the concern, the employee can raise a formal complaint via the Council's [Grievance procedure](#).