



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From Edward Argar MP
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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

16. iii. 2022

Dear *George,*

Thank you for your correspondence of 25 January to Sajid Javid on behalf of a number of your constituents, about compulsory COVID-19 vaccination for NHS staff. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I read the correspondence with care and appreciate your constituents' concerns. The Government is clear that the fantastic health and social care staff are our greatest asset. In these most difficult of times, and with ever-increasing pressures on the NHS and social care, they work incredibly hard, putting patients and service users first and keeping them safe whilst providing the care we all expect.

In November, the Government laid regulations that would introduce vaccination requirements in health and social care settings, with the aim of reducing COVID-19 transmission by minimising levels of infection amongst staff. Those receiving care can be some of the most vulnerable in society and face serious impacts if they are infected with COVID-19. This was the right and proportionate policy at the time, with the weight of clinical evidence on the then-dominant Delta variant outweighing workforce risks. At the time it was observed that, after two doses, vaccine effectiveness against symptomatic disease with the Delta variant reached 65 to 70 per cent for the University of Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine and 80 to 95 per cent for the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna vaccines.

However, shortly after the regulations were laid in Parliament, the Omicron variant began to emerge and now represents over 96 per cent of infections, up to 99 per cent in some regions. Given that Delta has been replaced as the dominant variant, the Government has revisited the balance of risks and opportunities that guided the original decision last year. In doing so, we identified that:

- we have better protection for the population against hospitalisation from COVID-19, owing to the success of our vaccination programme and high levels of prior COVID-19 infection;
- the Omicron variant is intrinsically less severe than the Delta variant, with the risk of presentation to emergency care or hospital admission approximately half that for Delta;
- further data collected by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) shows that a full primary course (two doses) of an approved vaccine does not provide the intended

longer-term public health protection against the Omicron variant, as it does with the Delta variant.

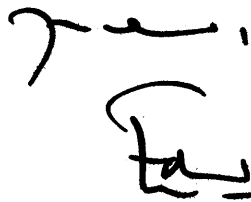
Having re-evaluated the evidence, and although vaccines remain our best defence against COVID-19, the Government no longer believes it proportionate to legally require the vaccination as a condition of deployment. The Government subsequently held a consultation, which closed on 16 February, to seek views on the matter. The consultation outcome was published on 1 March and can be found by visiting www.gov.uk and searching for 'revoking vaccination'.

While the Government's intention is to revoke vaccination as a condition of deployment under statute, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and the Chief Medical Officer have both been clear that getting vaccinated remains a professional duty. The Secretary of State has written to professional regulators, asking them to urgently review current guidance to vaccinations, including against COVID-19, to emphasise registrants' professional responsibilities in this area.

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency, in licensing the vaccines, has been clear that they are both safe and effective. Vaccines are the best way to protect people from COVID-19, and they remain the way out of this pandemic. Vaccinated people are far less likely to develop symptoms if they get COVID-19 and even less likely to get serious COVID-19, be admitted to hospital or die from it. The data also shows that, following the booster, people who are unvaccinated are up to eight times more likely to be hospitalised than those who are fully vaccinated. Booster vaccinations are estimated to have prevented over 100,000 people from being admitted to hospital with COVID-19 between mid-December and the beginning of February.

In addition, there is evidence that those who are vaccinated are less likely to pass the virus on to others. Therefore, the vaccines also provide some protection against transmission. A number of studies have provided evidence of reduced risk of household transmission when comparing people who have been vaccinated to those who have not.

I hope this reply is helpful.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edward Argar', written in a cursive style.

EDWARD ARGAR MP