



National Immunisation Advisory Committee & Faculty of Occupational Medicine

POSITION STATEMENT:

HEALTHCARE WORKERS AND COVID-19 VACCINATION

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POSITION STATEMENT ON HEALTHCARE WORKERS DECLINING COVID-19 VACCINATION

Introduction

Healthcare workers (HCW) are committed to promoting the health and welfare of patients, the public and their colleagues. It is the ethical responsibility of HCW to do no harm, to protect their patients, ensure they receive and promote accurate information and prevent spread of disease. Research has shown HCW to be trusted sources of information.

Proactive policy and procedure development by healthcare organisations is a required response to epidemic or pandemic diseases. Appropriate vaccination of staff and limiting transmission of the disease are obvious control measures which may necessitate moving unvaccinated staff away from high-risk areas while risk of COVID-19 acquisition and transmission remains.

The Covid-19 pandemic exemplifies a scenario in which HCW have a responsibility to accept a safe and effective vaccine to fulfil their ethical duty. Similarly, non-vaccinated HCW have an ethical duty to accept transmission control measures and the potential to be moved away from high-risk work areas.

Background

Frontline HCW are at significantly increased risk of COVID-19. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ireland in March 2020 there have been 26,225 cases (12.5%) reported in HCW, 786 have been hospitalised, 93 admitted to ICU and 12 died. In the first wave of the pandemic, HCP accounted for over 30% of cases. In Ireland, since the start of the pandemic there have been 352 outbreaks in acute hospitals, with 4,349 cases in total and 791 cases reported to be in HCW.

In the first wave in Scotland, HCW and their households contributed a sixth of COVID-19 cases admitted to hospital. Although the absolute risk of admission was low overall, frontline healthcare workers and their household members had threefold and twofold increased risks of admission with COVID-19.

Healthcare organisations look after many patients who are vulnerable to COVID-19 infection by virtue of their age or their underlying risk factors. Healthcare organisations have a duty of care to

protect both patients and healthcare workers. Deaths and severe disease from healthcare associated infection are an ongoing concern for clinicians, health service managers and patients.

COVID-19 vaccination of HCW is recommended as a priority by the National Immunisation Advisory Committee and the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as other expert bodies worldwide.

Considerations

In the absence of a precaution or medical contraindication, some HCW may be reluctant or may decline vaccination, despite the compelling evidence that vaccination prevents COVID-19 infection. They should be given an opportunity to discuss their concerns with an appropriate person e.g. occupational health practitioner, health and wellbeing service, line manager or peer-vaccinator.

The use of a declination form has been shown to improve uptake in other HCW vaccination programmes as recommended in [2018 RCPI Influenza vaccination of healthcare workers](#). A declination form should include the risks posed by the disease, the implications of vaccine refusal including possible reallocation from frontline care, the understanding that the HCW may decide to accept vaccination at any time and the reason(s) for refusal.

Those who previously declined vaccination and have changed their mind should be facilitated as soon as practicable.

Our position

In the interest of patient safety, the National Immunisation Advisory Committee together with the Faculty of Occupational Medicine strongly recommends the following:

All HCW should receive COVID-19 vaccination

Any HCW who declines COVID-19 vaccination should be given the opportunity to discuss their concerns with an appropriate person

Any HCW who declines COVID-19 vaccination should sign a declination form

Any HCW who declines COVID-19 vaccination may be allocated to a lower risk area

Any HCW who has declined COVID-19 vaccination and subsequently changes their mind should be vaccinated at the earliest opportunity

Any HCW with a medical contraindication to COVID-19 vaccination may be moved to a lower risk or non-clinical area

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