**Covid-19 Vaccination And Testing Policy: Post consultation BMT and Staff Hub**

**Version 0.3 29th March 2021**

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**Introduction**

The Government is currently rolling out its national COVID-19 vaccination and asymptomatic testing programme. This policy sets out MVDC’s stance on our staff being vaccinated and tested and how both programmes impact our workforce.

The purpose of having a vaccination and testing policy is to enable MVDC to continue to deliver services to the community and to keep those who work for us as safe as reasonably possible in regards to transmission of Covid-19.

As developments on the vaccine emerge, this policy may be reviewed in response – e.g. reflecting new scientific evidence or government approaches. Any material changes will be consulted upon.

**Policy application**

This policy applies to anybody working for MVDC whether permanent or individually contracted employees, casuals, or interims. **Councillors, other occupants of MVDC buildings and contractors where the work is outsourced (e.g. waste, leisure etc.) are out of scope of this policy.**

**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, GP surgeries and pharmacies.

We encourage staff 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](https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery/) for information on how to do this.

**Additional Protective Measure**

At the time of writing, vaccination for Covid-19 is seen as an additional protective measure for employees. It is no substitute for continuing to follow current legal requirements and government advice regarding shielding, self-isolation, social distancing, quarantining or any other relevant and current protective measure and, in addition, continuing to follow relevant MVDC instructions and measures such as those contained in the [Risk Assessments](https://molly.molevalley.gov.uk/homepage-2-column-coa/corona/page-2/) which are appropriate to an individual’s job, task or the premises within which he or she is working.

Vaccination status of other individuals (Councillors, building occupants, service users, work colleagues who do not require the vaccine for their job) is not within MVDC’s control. Each individual must therefore ensure he/she continues to take all required and recommended additional precautions for their own safety.

**Individual's decision**

When a coronavirus vaccination becomes available to you, we strongly encourage staff who are medically advised and or invited by their age group category to take up their opportunity to be vaccinated. We understand that for many employees 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 NHS and government sources;
* paying attention to the information the NHS provides when offering a vaccine; and
* being wary/cautious of misinformation around COVID-19 vaccinations put out by unreliable sources.

Depending on the job or task that you do, it may be necessary to discuss if the vaccine is a requirement for you to conduct your role/tasks safely and therefore if there are (or are likely to be) any impacts on your role if you decide you do not wish to have the vaccine when you are offered it.

In all circumstances we will seek to understand the nature of any concerns you may have.

**Priority Vaccination for eligible staff**

A very small number of our staff are eligible for priority vaccination alongside front line health and social care workers. These staff have been informed directly. These staff are referred to the section [**Asking you to tell us if you have had the vaccine**](#Tell)below and will be required to record their i-trent vaccination on i-trent for risk assessment and health and safety purposes.

**Further information**

Information on the national COVID-19 vaccination programme is set out at:

* [www.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/health-protection-immunisation](https://www.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/health-protection-immunisation), including details of:
  + the priority list for vaccination;
  + vaccination of specific groups, such as pregnant individuals and older people; and
  + what to expect after your vaccination, including guidance on returning to normal activities; and
* [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-vaccination/coronavirus-vaccine/), including details of:
  + who can get a vaccination;
  + the safety and effectiveness of being vaccinated; and
  + what to expect after your vaccination, including potential side effects.

In addition, information on local arrangements is available at [www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccination-programme](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/covid-19-vaccination-programme)

**Time off for vaccination appointments**

We will give all our employees paid time off to attend COVID-19 vaccination appointments.

Employees should still obtain approval from their line manager in advance of taking time off to attend a COVID-19 vaccination appointment. They should give their line manager as much notice as they can that they would like to take time off for this purpose.

Line managers may, at their discretion, ask employees to produce evidence of their appointment (for example an appointment card or email/text inviting them to a COVID-19 vaccination appointment).

**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 towards the end of their working day, they should discuss alternative arrangements with their line manager.

Any employees who feel unwell after receiving a coronavirus vaccination should take sickness absence in the usual way. Under our [usual sick leave policy](https://molly.molevalley.gov.uk/myhr/leave-and-time-off/sick-leave/) they should notify their line manager by telephone as soon as reasonably practicable, preferably before they are due to start work and in any event no later than the normal time they are due to begin work.

**Asking you to tell us if you have had the vaccine**

There are two reasons why we will ask you to tell us if you have had the vaccine.

**The first reason is in relation to the job that you do and our duty of care towards you, other employees and our service users.** If, for example, you do a job that requires you to work in the community you are more likely to catch (and potentially to transmit) the virus during the course of your work activities. In some cases you may be working with clinically extremely vulnerable people (or those for whom it is not easy to determine health status) or you may be conducting an activity where it is less likely that strict social distancing will always be observed (e.g. where there is the potential for conflict with a service user). In these cases the vaccine provides an additional level of protection to both you and the service user and must therefore be considered as part of our duty of care to both parties.

Information is evolving all the time on the impact of the vaccine, however whilst having the vaccine cannot guarantee that you will not contract the virus, current studies indicate that it is less likely that you will catch the virus, and in the event that you do, that the severity of any illness will be reduced. (Studies demonstrate that Covid-19 is reduced amongst the majority of those who have been vaccinated and there is therefore less likelihood of hospitalisation and/or death). This therefore means that the risk is reduced for you personally and for any services users you are in contact with if you have the vaccine (provided you are medically advised to do so).

**Your manager may therefore discuss vaccination as part of the Risk Assessments for the work that you do in order to establish protective measures – one such measure being the vaccine.**

**The second reason is to ensure that MVDC maintains a resilient and flexible workforce.** Examples of this include, but are not limited to, being able to cover others who may be absent or have additional workload; undertake relevant general duties appropriate to a particular type of role (e.g. being a manager at a level of seniority such that it is expected you are able to be flexible according to business need); or if you may need to speak to people in person in unforeseen circumstances sometimes at short notice; or to conduct additional elements that are not part of your role but you have agreed to undertake (e.g. First Aider). For an organisation as small and complex as MVDC people will often conduct additional tasks and have responsibilities that sit outside the prescribed and anticipated activities related to their specific job role.

**For the first and second reasons your manager will ask you to inform him/her that you have had the vaccine and you will be required to record it on your i-trent record (Guidance to follow). This information is collected for risk assessment and HR related purposes in relation to the job (or task) that you do.**

As stated in point 2 above it is not always possible to identify an activity that may put you at higher risk in advance. Whilst Risk Assessments must be in place for every anticipated activity, on occasion things may fall outside this, and for this reason vaccination for Covid-19 is likely to be an important additional protective measure.

**If you conduct any tasks or work (including additional work related) activities that may put you at higher risk it is important that you record receipt of the Covid-19 vaccination on your i-trent record and inform your manager that you have done so.** Failing to establish that you have had the vaccine will not mean that you will not be asked to undertake additional activities commensurate to your role and skills and experience from time to time. It will however be part of a risk based approach which will include taking additional personal responsibility for social distancing or other protective measures.

It is possible that some service users will ask if the relevant MVDC staff have been vaccinated in order to reduce their concerns about transmission. No personal information on this will be provided by MVDC until there is further government guidance on this – at which point revisions to this policy will be considered and communicated to you if appropriate (in advance of any further processing taking place). Service users may, however, be provided with a copy of this policy in order to establish our organisational position.

**Covid measures in MVDC buildings**

MVDC buildings are not just workplaces, but public buildings. At the time of writing it is not realistic to assume that everybody entering the building will have had the vaccine (or a negative Covid-test). At some point the building(s) will open again to visitors, Councillors, residents or local business representatives and it will not be lawful to conduct checks before granting access. It is clear that vaccination is an **additional** protective measure, but it cannot be relied upon as the only measure and at the current time it should not change behaviours.

Covid measures will therefore continue to apply. These currently include social distancing, the use of face coverings, enhanced cleaning, restricting numbers of occupants at any given time, etc., as per the Risk Assessments that have been conducted for all premises, tasks and activities. These will be reviewed as needed and in response to any governmental changes in the coming months. In addition any staff with symptoms/positive tests must follow the government guidance **and** [the procedure on Molly](https://molly.molevalley.gov.uk/homepage-2-column-coa/corona/technical-guidance-working-from-home/) immediately.

Any staff with particular concerns about using the building must discuss with their manager. (Proactive and early discussion is advised in order to maximise the opportunity to respond to concerns, do not wait until there is a need to go in on a given day). Confidential health risk assessments can be conducted for anybody who believes they are Clinically Vulnerable or Clinically Extremely Vulnerable.

**Asymptomatic Testing**

Surrey County Council has put in place a community testing programme offering symptom-free testing for using lateral flow devices (LFD) to people who have no coronavirus symptoms and have to leave home for work.  This is open to you if you live or work in Surrey and do not have access to symptom-free testing through other routes. There are a variety of locations available including pharmacies in Dorking and Leatherhead (though there may also be one closer to your home).  We therefore encourage you to book an appointment at the most convenient location and arrange to be tested – the recommendation is twice a week, though this will depend on your working arrangements (e.g. if you are only out of the house one day a week or less this frequency may not be necessary).

You may be able to participate in home testing – for example, this could be in connection with any school age children who are part of your household.

It is important to note that this is only for use if you have no symptoms and have not been told to self-isolate for any Coronavirus related reason.  This is asymptomatic testing only using a lateral flow device.  It is not completely reliable as it only reads positive if you are carrying a high viral load, therefore even if you receive a negative test **you must continue with all the usual precautions (Hands, Face, Space)** and follow the procedures in the relevant [Risk Assessments](https://molly.molevalley.gov.uk/homepage-2-column-coa/corona/page-2/).  You may not find out your test result immediately therefore in the absence of any other reasons to self-isolate you should continue your duties using all current precautions but if you later find out you are positive you must immediately inform your manager and start your self-isolation.  You will also need to ensure you have provided further information on your whereabouts [through this procedure](https://molevalleydc.sharepoint.com/:w:/s/Team-HRa/ES2f0HCXM7hCpXPT9vODBZABUtikqc3AOVH-Gb8xKIzbHQ?e=9P7rK1) as soon as you are safely in self-isolation.

This, and a variety of other questions, are answered in the Q&As you can find on the site. [Find out more and book your space here.](https://scc.covid19testing.org.uk/) The testing is currently available 8 am to 8 pm weekdays.

**Treating colleagues with respect**

We recognise that the subject of the COVID-19 vaccination programme can be divisive and lead to the expression of strong opinions. However, employees must remain responsible and respectful when communicating with their colleagues about COVID-19 vaccinations. Harassment or intimidation of colleagues because of their views or individual circumstances may lead to disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal.

**Data Protection**

In accordance with the section [**Asking you to tell us if you have had the vaccine**](#Tell)the reasons and circumstances in which we require you to tell us are stated above.

A Data Privacy Impact Assessment has been conducted in conjunction with this policy and is available from the Data Protection Officer up on request.

An Amended Employer’s Privacy Statement has also been prepared and is available here (LINK TO FOLLOW).

**Document Information and Governance**

Approved by: SLT   
Date: Monday 29th March 2021Version control: V0.3

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| **Version** | **Version Status**  ***(Draft, Approved /Published Internally or Externally)*** | **Date** | **Version Comment** | **Version Author** |
| V0.1 | Draft | 1st March 2021 | Creation of the document | KI |
|  |  | 2nd March 2021 | Further draft (tracked changes) after TP comments | KI |
|  |  | 4th March 2021 | Further draft (tracked changes) after continued review and sight of DPIA | KI |
|  |  | 4th March 2021 | Final untracked draft send to SLT for comment and approval | KI |
| V0.2 | Approved Draft | 8th March 2021 | Approved by SLT for next steps – BMT and Staff Hub consultation from Tues 9th March to Mon 22nd March | KI |
| *V0.3* | *Further draft* | *29th March 2021* | *Approved by SLT for consultation with remaining staff* |  |
| *V0.4(?)* | *Approved policy* | *12th April* | *SLT signed off policy* |  |
| *V1* | *Published* |  | *1st Publication* |  |