

Nearly half of care home staff might not take Covid vaccine - as healthcare bosses call on ministers to make jobs compulsory

by Tom Pyman in the Mail Online

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Nearly half of care home staff won't take the coronavirus vaccine, with bosses desperately calling on ministers to make jobs compulsory among healthcare workers.

Nadra Ahmed, chairman of the National Care Association, said as many as 40% of carers could choose not to take up the option as it is rolled out over the coming days.

One care home owner claimed if they got to such a situation, they would feel obliged to disclose the low take-up not only to family members but also the local authority, adding it wasn't clear who would be liable if someone were to fall ill.

As a result, there are growing calls to make it a requirement for such workers to take the jab in a bid to win the war on Covid-19.

Ms Ahmed told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: 'We know that between 50-60%, depending on individual services, the staff are actually saying they will definitely have the vaccine and are very keen.

'We understand between about 17-20% of staff in services are saying they definitely won't have it, and then you have the rest who are waiting to see.

'So we are looking at potentially 40% who decide not to have it.'

Put to her that this was a 'huge' number of care workers, Ms Ahmed replied: 'It certainly is, however I do think people will start to change their minds as the vaccine becomes more readily available and they see colleagues having it.

'I think the uncertainty rests somewhere around fear but then also there are people with conditions who are being advised not to have it, so the picture is a little bit hazy at the moment but we are doing all we can.

'It's stunning because they've been working and seeing the direct results of the impact of this virus.

'We've tried to get them to have the flu jab, for instance, and the take-up on that isn't very good.

'In the NHS they're incentivised to have which seems quite perverse in some ways.

'But it's not in their contract that they have to have these vaccines, it's an optional part of life.'

However, a care home boss, who wanted to remain anonymous, told the programme of their fears of the impact if such a large number of staff refuse to take the jab.

They said: 'If we get to a situation where, say, half of my staff aren't vaccinated then I think we'd have to disclose that, not just to family members, but the local authority.

'I don't know why they can force people to stay in their homes or not go to the pubs but they can't force them to do the right thing which is to take the vaccine.

'If someone next year catches Covid in my home and it comes from a staff member who's not vaccinated, who bears liability there? Is it me or my employee?

'Or the government for not making it mandatory? Can I stop them working? I can't make it a condition of employment, they're well within their rights to expect to get paid and come to work.'

Bobby Ahmed, an employment lawyer, told the programme there could be grounds to make take-up of the vaccine mandatory in the care sector.

'I do feel that while not all employers would be able to avail themselves in terms of mandating health and safety requirements for employees to be vaccinated, because they would have to demonstrate that it is reasonable and proportionate, I think there is most certainly within the care home setting a workplace specific argument to support vaccination as a precondition of work.

'In that respect, while there are no statutory positions to allow the UK Government to force individuals to become vaccinated, there is legislation within the employment context which certainly care providers can avail themselves of.

'The main one here is the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, which obliges employers to take reasonable steps to reduce any workplace risks and in the context of vulnerable workers, that is clearly apparent.

'They have to ensure that there are appropriate (steps taken) to ensure that the vulnerable persons that care is being provided to are not exposed to such risks.

'I would think it is highly likely it could be deemed to be reasonable for employers to ask employees to be vaccinated.'

Ms Ahmed said the mooted rejection of the vaccine by some will contribute to the need for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to continue beyond widespread vaccinations.

She went on: 'We will be having visits into the care services, we will have residents potentially who can't have the vaccine, so I think PPE remains in place and we will be advising everyone to continue to use PPE.

'I don't think PPE is something that is just going to disappear once the vaccines have been taken.'

It comes amid reports that dozens of GP surgeries have decided against taking part in the roll-out due to 'concerns their workloads are already too heavy.'

Around 100,000 Britons will reportedly have to go elsewhere for their Covid-19 inoculations as the second stage of the UK's mass vaccination programme begins in local GP practices next week.

Doctors in 250 of England's Primary Care Networks are expected to start administering the jab from Monday, with more practices across the country joining in throughout December.

They have been advised that they will need to use the vaccine within three-and-a-half days, not the previously suggested five days, to adhere to regulatory requirements set by the MHRA, the UK's medicines regulator.

But some GPs say they are already too busy to administer the vaccine, and their patients could suffer if practices have to cut back other services so doctors can give the injections, the Guardian reported.