

Resolution Date: 12th January 2021

Resolution Title: Respect members choice over the Covid vaccine

The Housing worker branch LE/1111 notes: -

The World Health Organisation (WHO) declared the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a pandemic. Their latest information is available at www.who.int/COVID-19. WHO says those most at risk of severe illness are 'older people; and those with underlying medical conditions affect the poorest in society disproportionately.

The Pfizer / BioNTech vaccine was approved for emergency use in the UK on the 2 of December and first administered on 8th December 2020 in Coventry. The disproportionality of BAEM Covid-19 deaths has deepened the level of mistrust. Some are suspicious of being classified as vulnerable for the vaccine when by contrast, they are not classified as vulnerable when it comes to getting jobs, housing and healthcare. For example, the unethical Tuskegee Syphilis Study by US Public Health Service which left untreated Syphilis in African American males for research purposes.

(Also see <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2019/nov/28/polio-outbreaks-in-four-african-countries-caused-by-mutation-of-strain-in-vaccine#:~:text=New%20cases%20of%20polio%20linked,according%20to%20global%20health%20numbers>. as an indicator of distrust and reliance on untested vaccinations.)

Closer to home, women of African heritage are 5 times more likely to die from pregnancy complications than their white counterpart. MBRRACE-UK Nov 2018 (Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries across the UK)

[The government's annual statutory homeless report](#) revealed that 10.7 per cent of people applying to councils for help with homelessness between April 2019 and March 2020 were black despite making up only three per cent of households in England.

The inequality means that, according to analysis from [The Big Issue's Ride Out Recession Alliance](#) partners Shelter, one in 23 black households became homeless or were threatened with homelessness pre-Covid-19 pandemic compared to just one in 83 households from all other ethnicities combined. One in 23 black households became homeless or were threatened with homelessness pre-Covid 19 pandemic compared to just one in 83 households from all other ethnicities combined.

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With the above information some people of African heritage are somewhat apprehensive of the quick roll out of the vaccination. There is a risk if management decide that only vaccinated people can perform certain roles (based of course on a thorough documented risk assessment) and then there are more unvaccinated people than roles available then there is a possibility that capability or even redundancy measures might end up being triggered.

That will raise difficult and possibly conflicting issues of

- the employer's duty to ensure a safe place of work;
- personal freedom on the part of the employee choosing not to have the vaccine,
- the s.7 [HASAWA](#) duty on the employee to take reasonable care for the health and safety of himself and of other persons who may be affected by his acts or omissions at work;
- confidentiality & equalities
- whether workers can or should be prevented from attending work without proof of vaccination and, if it becomes permissible to collect employee vaccination data, how to verify the accuracy of such data – medical certificate/self-disclosure etc

If workers are prevented lawfully from attending work because they have not been immunised, how the right to pay might be affected. For example:

- where the worker has not been vaccinated due to no fault of their own e.g. they are young, and not in a vulnerable group, and are not currently eligible to be vaccinated; or
- where the worker has been unable to be vaccinated as a result of illness; fear of side-effects; mental health issues; or other genuine reasons
- whether it is appropriate to create a "two-tier" workforce (obviously there are different considerations for those who are able to work from home versus those who cannot)
- The GDPR and privacy consequences of workers potentially being required to prove that they have been vaccinated, and the possible inception of "COVID passports"

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- Any diversity/ethical angles to vaccination (for example, special treatment for those who are pregnant; or as a result of religion or belief and, in particular, whether a belief in the virtues of not being vaccinated could be a philosophical belief.

Housing worker Branch believes:-

Mistrust is largely due to health inequalities and racism black people have faced for decades.

Housing worker Branch calls on Unite to: -

Prioritise the importance of having the vaccination for all frontline workers especially those in Social Care, workers in Care Homes and those working directly with clients or patients.

Provide the full information that they need to make an informed decision about vaccination.

Secure commitments that there will be no negative implications for staff who refuse the vaccine. Specifically, that it will not influence decisions made about terms and conditions such as re-deployment, shielding, or pay progression. It is a difficult subject and draws attention to ethical and practical concerns. We recognise the personal decisions people need to make.

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