



9<sup>th</sup> December 2021

Deputy Roisin Shorthall TD,  
Dáil Eireann,  
Leinster House,  
Kildare Street,  
Dublin 2.

Dear Deputy Shorthall,

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has been requested to reply directly to you in the context of the following Parliamentary Question, which was submitted to this Department for response.

**PQ: 58124/21**

**To ask the Minister for Health the policy and practice in respect of home help and homecare workers who are not vaccinated: if clients who do not wish to have unvaccinated workers in their home and providing personal care are facilitated with alternative staff; and if he will make a statement on the matter.**

The Home Support Service is funded by Government to deliver a volume of service each year as approved in the HSE National Service Plan. It is a non-statutory service and access to the current service is based on assessment of the person's needs by the HSE and having regard to the available resources and the competing demands for the services from those people with assessed needs.

Home Support services for older people are provided either by directly employed staff or by voluntary and private providers who have formal tender arrangements with the HSE to deliver the services. The type of support provided includes personal care and, where appropriate, essential household duties relating to the client's assessed needs.

The COVID-19 vaccination rollout has been hugely successful nationally, with 94% of the population fully vaccinated with their first course of vaccination (two shots), and presently, the rollout of the booster programme is well underway, with just over one million third shots administered. In relation to directly employed HSE staff, the majority have received their full course of vaccination against COVID-19, with many having received their third booster dose. The HSE is already seeing the benefits of staff vaccination in terms of the dramatic reduction in cases of infection and disease amongst staff.

Vaccination helps to keep our healthcare workers and the people they care for safe. The HSE continues to support staff who may not be eligible for vaccination for specific medical reasons or who have not yet accepted vaccination for other reasons. The opportunity to avail of vaccination remains available at any time to people who decide to accept vaccination.

While the HSE continues to support all staff throughout the ongoing pandemic and with their vaccination for COVID-19, we also need to manage the risks associated with potential transmission of the virus to those most vulnerable in our care.

The HSE is committed to keeping our staff and service users safe and has taken all necessary steps to ensure the mitigation of transmission of COVID-19 across our services. In addition to the protection afforded to staff and patients/clients through vaccination against COVID-19, PPE is also readily available to all healthcare workers, including Home Support staff. Standard precautions including hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, cough etiquette and environmental hygiene remain critical to minimise the risk to staff and patients/clients of the transmission of COVID-19.


Recent guidance from the Data Protection Commissioner confirms that the HSE can, in certain circumstances request that staff confirm their vaccination status by reference to the HSE's vaccine recommendations and having regard to its obligations under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 and the Medical Officer of Health legislation. This is also subject to the assessment of the health and safety risks presented, as specifically required under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Biological Agents) Regulations, 2013. Additionally, it is subject to the assessment of risks associated with employee's rights under data protection legislation.

In terms of HSE policy, the HSE has adopted the view of the Data Protection Commissioner as outlined above, and therefore all high risk areas of the health service must be subject to risk assessment, to determine the level of risk associated in the context of vaccination status and COVID-19. This policy is widely available to all staff throughout the health service.

Therefore, in the event of a case whereby an unvaccinated member of staff was deemed high risk to enter the home of a Home Support client, an alternative carer may be assigned to the client in order to mitigate any risk of transmissibility of COVID-19.

The HSE together with Approved Providers, continue to engage collaboratively to ensure the ongoing provision of home support services especially those clients with assessed high priority care needs.

Yours sincerely,



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**Sandra Tuohy**  
**Assistant National Director – Operations**  
**Services for Older People**