



The BMJ

Cite this as: *BMJ* 2020;371:m4044<http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m4044>

Published: 16 October 2020

Midwives and paramedics can deliver flu and covid vaccines after new laws come into force

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A wider range of healthcare workers—including midwives, paramedics, physiotherapists, and pharmacists—are now allowed to give flu and potentially covid-19 vaccines after the introduction of new laws by the UK government.

The changes to the Human Medicines Regulations 2012, first proposed in August¹ and consulted upon last month, came into effect on 16 October.²

The Department of Health and Social Care said that the expanded workforce will have to undergo additional training to ensure patient safety. It added that government planning will “ensure this does not affect other services in hospitals and in GP and community services, by drawing on a pool of experienced NHS professionals through the NHS Bring Back Scheme.”

Commenting on the changes, England’s deputy chief medical officer Jonathan Van-Tam said, “The measures outlined today aim to improve access and strengthen existing safeguards protecting patients.”

The changes will also allow the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) to grant temporary authorisation of a covid-19 vaccine if one proves to be safe and effective before 2021, without needing to rely on the European Medicines Agency.³ Before this, the EMA would have been the only body able to grant a licence for such a vaccine, up until the end of the Brexit transition period in 2021.

Interim chief scientific officer at the MHRA, Christian Schneider, said, “Patient safety is our top priority. The independent commission on human medicines will advise the UK government on the safety, quality, and effectiveness of any potential vaccine. No vaccine will be deployed unless stringent standards have been met through a comprehensive clinical trial programme.

“The preferred route to enable deployment of any new vaccine remains through the usual product licensing processes. But reinforced safeguards are now in place to strengthen the regulatory regime and our ability to protect public health, should temporary authorisations be necessary.”

Health secretary Matt Hancock said, “These legal changes will help us in doing everything we can to make sure we are ready to roll out a safe and effective covid-19 vaccine as soon as it has passed clinical trials and undergone rigorous checks by the regulator.”

1 Mahase E. Midwives, paramedics, and physiotherapists could deliver covid and flu vaccines under government plan. *BMJ* 2020;370:m3375. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m3375 pmid: 32859579

2 Department of Health and Social Care. Distributing vaccines and treatments for COVID-19 and flu <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/distributing-vaccines-and-treatments-for-covid-19-and-flu>

3 Dyer C. Covid-19: Government poised to amend regulations to allow use of unlicensed vaccine. *BMJ* 2020;370:m3757. doi: 10.1136/bmj.m3757 pmid: 32988957

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