

Copy: ICS Leaders, Directors of Public Health and Primary Care, Pharmacy Contract Managers

*An electronic copy of this letter, and all other relevant guidance from NHS England and NHS Improvement can be found here:*

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/primary-care>

**27 November 2020**

Dear Community Pharmacy Contractors and Local Pharmaceutical Committees

**URGENT PREPARING FOR COMMUNITY PHARMACY TO CONTRIBUTE TO A POTENTIAL COVID-19 VACCINATION PROGRAMME**

Several potential vaccines for COVID-19 are in the later stages of phase III trials. If one or more are authorised for use, the NHS needs to be ready to start immediate vaccination.

The NHS is a global leader in achieving high levels of vaccine coverage. The UK has one of the world's highest levels of public support for making a safe COVID-19 vaccine available and community pharmacy is currently doing an outstanding job of increasing coverage under the expanded winter flu programme. Through their place in local neighbourhoods, pharmacies are well placed to reach out to our diverse communities and avoid inequalities in access. This means community pharmacy will have an important role in a potential COVID-19 vaccination programme.

There will be a large-scale vaccination programme across England. The programme will include a variety of vaccination models, including some local vaccination services commissioned from primary care. We are commissioning an [Enhanced Service from general practice](#). You may have seen that we have invited general practices to collaborate, nominating premises in their Primary Care Network grouping that will administer vaccines to their combined population.

Community pharmacy contractors and workforce will be able to support the COVID-19 vaccination service in a number of ways:

- Individuals who are able to support local workforce arrangements can do so by joining the [NHS COVID-19 vaccine team](#).
- Community pharmacy contractors can collaborate with their local Primary Care Network to support them to deliver maximum vaccine uptake via the GP Enhanced Service or with vaccination centres. This may be, for example, to increase capacity or target certain populations such as care homes by entering into a sub-contracting agreement. PCN groupings would be responsible for meeting the costs of any additional paid workforce.
- NHS England and NHS Improvement regional teams will also commission selected community pharmacy contractors who are able to meet the requirements to provide a COVID-19 vaccination service from pharmacy-led designated sites. Due to the likelihood of complex logistics in this new supply chain, there will be a limited number of sites commissioned to deliver high volumes of vaccines mostly at a separate site, for twelve-hour days, seven days a week. We expect to commission fewer community pharmacy sites than GP PCN led centres. We do not expect the majority of contractors sites will be able to meet these requirements and expect them to continue their very important role in flu vaccination, particularly of the new 50-64 year-old cohort, and provision of other pharmaceutical services.

### **Commissioning of pharmacy-led sites**

Community pharmacy-led designated vaccination sites will be commissioned as a Local Enhanced Service (LES) by NHS England and NHS Improvement regional teams in consultation with Local Pharmaceutical Committees.

Key requirements must be met by all designated sites. These include facilities, availability of workforce, equity of access, geographical coverage and total number of sites that can be accommodated within the COVID-19 vaccine supply chain. There will be a requirement to be able to administer at least 1000 vaccines each week.

There will be a designation and assessment process that will provide NHS England and NHS Improvement with a priority list which will be used to make commissioning decisions.

### **Supporting documentation**

**Annex A** is a Reference Guide providing further information on the likely ask of community pharmacy designated sites, and the likely content of the LES agreement.

**Annex B** sets out the process for designating sites to administer vaccinations.

A summary of the designation process and key features of the LES agreement are detailed below.

A LES agreement will be published shortly.

## **Timelines**

Timelines are affected by uncertainty over when a vaccine may be approved, the need to use vaccine supplies as soon as they become available, and the important role played by community pharmacy providers in both flu vaccination and medicines supply throughout December. We are planning for designated pharmacy-led sites to be ready to administer vaccines from late December or early January with exact date dependent on individual vaccine licensing dates and manufacturers' supply schedules.

Aspects of a potential COVID-19 vaccination programme can only be finalised when final trial results and licensing of vaccines has occurred. The JCVI will then finalise cohort prioritisation, and which vaccines are most suitable for different cohorts. So, while the information in the Reference Guide should be viewed as provisional it should provide pharmacy contractors with enough information to start planning. A final LES agreement will be issued as soon as details are clear.

## **Designation Process**

This letter starts the designation process.

A key requirement of pharmacies wishing to lead a pharmacy designated vaccination site under the LES is that the contractor can meet the core site and workforce requirements.

The NHS England and NHS Improvement regional team will consult the Local Pharmaceutical Committee on commissioning a Local Enhanced Service where they have established that additional sites are required to maximise system capacity. They may also communicate with contractors who have expressed an interest in providing the service.

If a contractor thinks they can meet an identified need they should complete Section 1 of the specified designation form and submit this to the NHS England and NHS Improvement regional team to formally express an interest in becoming a designated site.

1. Pharmacy contractors will need to complete and submit (using Section 1 of the specified designation form) to the local NHS England and NHS Improvement regional team as soon as possible, and by 4pm Sunday 6 December 2020, the details of the site (or sites) initially being nominated.

They should only do so if they are confident that they can meet all of the designation requirements.

2. An NHS England and NHS Improvement representative will review submissions, and invite contractors whose submission meet the identified system needs to complete Section 2 of the designation form, providing supporting evidence on how they will meet the specified criteria (covering planning and co-ordination, site safety and security, vaccine wastage, space, workforce, patient experience, vaccine storage and handling, preparation, administration, aftercare, data collection and reporting). These additional details should be provided as soon as possible, but by 4pm Friday 11 December 2020.
3. An NHS England and NHS Improvement representative will then undertake a process to assess the extent to which the nominated site meets each of the specified criteria. The NHS England and NHS Improvement regional team in consultation with the National COVID-19 Vaccination Programme will decide whether the site(s) should be designated. Contractors whose site(s) have been successful will be informed of the outcome by Friday 18 December 2020 and commissioned to participate in the LES.

### **LES agreement summary**

The LES and process to designate sites to operate under it, will be the only process to establish Community Pharmacy-led designated sites.

Pharmacy contractors will be expected to co-ordinate and deliver COVID-19 vaccinations at scale, working in collaboration with commissioners, regional operations and other local providers to develop and implement a local delivery plan. The ambition is to safely vaccinate the maximum number of patients in the minimum amount of time, across a range of vaccination centres, subject to vaccine supply.

Designated sites will need to be able to deliver a vaccination service between 8am and 8pm, seven days per week including bank holidays, where needed. Vaccines, consumables and PPE will be centrally supplied, and guidance will be issued shortly on the ordering process. Pharmacy contractors will need to deliver a minimum of 1000 doses of vaccine over a seven-day period from each designated site, ensuring all those vaccinations are administered within the appropriate shelf life. On a regular basis, eg each week, they will need to agree the volumes they will deliver, working closely with their local NHS coordination centre.

Providers should plan on the assumption that two doses of COVID-19 vaccinations will need to be administered to each patient, 3-5 weeks apart. The spacing between vaccines is subject to confirmation from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and may be specific to the type of vaccine being administered.

The JCVI has already set out draft prioritisation and the order in which eligible adult cohorts should be vaccinated. Pharmacy contractors will have a particularly important role to play in contributing to administering vaccinations to cohorts of at-risk patients and health and social care staff. Pharmacy contractors will need to align vaccination delivery with the national timetable for the call/recall of eligible cohorts.

A national call-recall system as well as local general practice call-recall will be in operation to help maximise uptake.

Once patients are notified they are eligible for a vaccination, they will have the choice to book an appointment at a PCN general practice designated site or use the National Booking Service to book with a community pharmacy designated site, other local vaccination service or vaccination centre. Pharmacy contractors must meet the requirements for interacting with the National Booking Service.

All staff involved in administration of the vaccine will need to complete relevant training provided by PHE/HEE, which will be available online.

Contractors will need to provide the majority of the required staff from their own workforce. Additional workforce, including volunteers may be available through local channels, although this should not be relied upon when seeking designation.

The Item of Service fee will be £12.58 per vaccination. This additional payment, beyond the flu vaccination IOS, recognises the extended requirements around the COVID-19 vaccination, including training, the need for post-vaccine observation and any associated costs thereafter. The Item of Service fee will be paid on completion of the final dose (ie £25.16 if the vaccination requires two doses) unless in exceptional circumstances the final dose cannot be administered, eg because of intolerance/clinical agreement. NHS England and NHS Improvement has provided additional support to pharmacy contractors for the flu programme (eg additional venue hire). These arrangements will be extended to support the COVID vaccination programme, which will also be supported by a national inventory to supply vaccines and consumables, and limited funding for pre-agreed one-off set up costs.

Alongside the LES agreement, a set of documents will be published to support pharmacy contractors to plan for and deliver the service including, but not limited to:

- clinical guidance
- further operational guidance including a standard operating procedure with details on ordering vaccinations, reporting arrangements and payment processes, etc
- a Patient Group Direction (and National Protocol subject to Ministerial approval)

Classification: Official

Publications approval reference: C0912

- staff sharing agreement/template honorary contract for additional staff employed
- frequently asked questions.

### Summary of next steps

Even though we do not yet know when the first vaccination will become available, it is critical that pharmacy contractors are ready to administer vaccinations from late December or early January. The key milestones over the next month are as follows:

Pharmacy contractors to advise NHS England and NHS Improvement of their interest in designation	Sunday 6 December
Further information requested to be submitted by contractors	Friday 11 December
NHS England and NHS Improvement decision communicated to pharmacy contractors along with formal commissioning offer to pharmacies with an approved designated site to sign up to deliver the Local Enhanced Service	Friday 18 December
Final enhanced service agreement published	As soon possible when a vaccine becomes available.
Administration of the vaccinations	Late December / Early January

As new vaccines or further vaccine supplies become available, or if there are changes in requirements, NHS England and NHS Improvement may choose to commission this service from additional sites or with amended requirements. If this becomes the case then further communication will follow.

We will be holding further webinars during December for:

- NHS England and NHS Improvement Regional Teams on the site designation process.
- Pharmacy Contractors on the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme LES agreements.

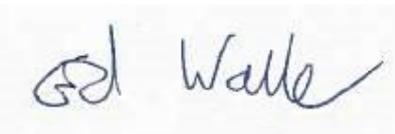
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We want to offer our sincerest thanks in anticipation of your support to deliver this programme at a time when demands on pharmacy and the wider health system are significant. We have heard loud and clear that community pharmacy wants to play its part in this hugely important challenge of delivering the vaccination programme and we look forward to supporting you in doing so.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Emily Lawson', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Emily Lawson  
NHS Chief Commercial Officer and SRO Vaccine Programme  
NHS England and NHS Improvement

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ed Waller', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Ed Waller  
Director of Primary Care  
NHS England and NHS Improvement

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'K.W. Ridge', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Dr Keith Ridge CBE  
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for England  
NHS England and NHS Improvement