

MANDATORY VACCINATION PLANS SET TO DEVASTATE DENTAL SERVICES

The British Dental Association has warned fast-tracked parliamentary approval of mandatory vaccination of healthcare workers is set to have a calamitous impact on dental services already stretched to breaking point, with new evidence suggesting levels of hesitancy could push thousands out of the workforce.

According to a survey of high street dentists in England:

1 in 10 respondents say they are not fully vaccinated, with 9% reporting they have not had their first jab

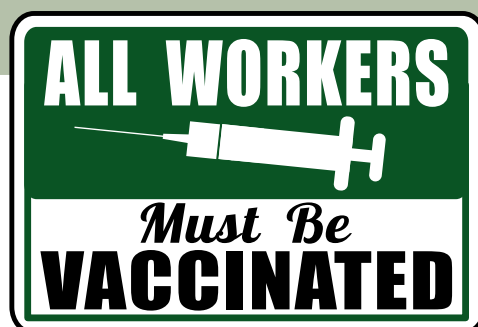
Less than two-thirds of respondents believe all dentists operating in their practices are fully vaccinated, with less than half saying the same for dental nurses, who are integral to supporting the delivery of care

Over 30% believe dental nurses based at their practices will leave as a result of the mandate, with nearly 15% of dentists saying they will leave themselves. Even some who have received the vaccine cite ethical concerns of working under this compulsory model.

NHS England has acknowledged it has no indication of vaccine uptake among the high street NHS dental workforce and other contractors like GPs, who deliver NHS services but are not NHS employees. Dentist leaders stress these data give the clearest indication yet of the potential scale of the damage that mandating vaccinations could cause.

Under new regulations staff will risk facing the sack if they are not double jabbed by April. With recruitment and retention problems already endemic among both dentists and the wider team, any exodus will have devastating consequences for patient access. The service is already facing unprecedented backlogs, with over 37 million NHS dental appointments lost since the first lockdown due to service shut-down and infection control measures.

The vaccine mandate will cover all CQC-registered health professionals, so will include dentists and their teams across both NHS and private settings. There are



currently more than 28,000 General Dental Practitioners working in high street practice in England, and nearly 47,000 registered dental nurses. The BDA has warned that on the basis of this intelligence the mandate risks translating into thousands of vacancies that will likely remain unfilled.

The BDA has supported the vaccine rollout, but has decryed the lack of any meaningful scrutiny of the regulations, which was subject to a damning report by the House of Lords Secondary Legislation Scrutiny Committee. While an impact assessment was published at the eleventh hour, it has simply extrapolated patterns of vaccine hesitancy for primary care dentistry from the wider NHS workforce, and not even acknowledged the depth of recruitment and retention problems in the sector. The union has stressed that current Standard Operating Procedures, which includes twice-weekly COVID-19 tests for team members, already set a rigorous standard for protecting both patients and staff.

BDA Chair Eddie Crouch said: 'Mandatory vaccination risks dropping a bomb on a service already stretched to breaking point. We now face a grim New Year where thousands of dental team members will walk out as a result of regulations railroaded through parliament, leaving thousands of vacancies that will never be filled.

'Dentists have supported the vaccine rollout, with many downing drills to play their part, but Ministers must think again about compulsion.

'Dental services are already operating to a rigorous standard on safety. This mandate is a blunt instrument, which will have devastating consequences for millions of patients across this country.'

Northern Ireland: 2022 branch programme launched

The BDA Northern Ireland Branch programme has been launched and paper copies are currently landing with members.

This year's programme of CPD events aims to deliver maximum benefit to dental professionals with engaging thought-leadership from some inspiring speakers:

- Forensic dentistry with Séamus Napier on 8 February
- Minimally invasive dentistry in paediatrics with Nora O'Murchu and Shaunice Gallagher on 15 March
- 'Mutating microbes – what has the pandemic done to us?' with Wendy Thompson on 12 April
- Tooth auto-transplantation with Laura Cross on 13 September.

As Branch President for 2022, Peter Crooks, writes: 'In developing this CPD programme for 2022, I am hoping we will be encouraged to do something different, perhaps learn a new technique for our clinical practice, look at dentistry with a wider perspective or consider if our skills could be valued further afield.'

It's not all CPD, however. The BDA Northern Ireland Branch are also planning social events, providing you with excellent networking opportunities and peer support. Included in this year's calendar are:

- The Presidential Installation Dinner, date to be confirmed
- Spring Walk at Mountsandel Forest on 7 May
- Golf Events at Ardglass Golf Club on 1 April and Royal Belfast Golf Club on 17 June.

To view the full programme visit <https://bda.org/dentists/governance-and-representation/Branch-and-Sections/Documents/NI-branch-programme-2022.pdf>

