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EXCLUSIVE

Coronavirus latest: Army to help NHS deliver biggest vaccination push in British history

Huge teams of nurses and army medics expected to give injections when a vaccine is ready



By Jane Merrick

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The scale of the programme, potentially to cover the entire UK population of nearly 67 million, would also require military assistance (Photo: Andrew Milligan/AFP/Getty)

The Army is to be drafted in for the biggest vaccination programme in UK history to protect the population against coronavirus, **i** can reveal.



Nightingale hospitals – currently mothballed after the first wave of the pandemic – and public buildings could be commandeered as mass vaccination sites.

The **i** politics newsletter cut through the noise



NHS managers have been told to produce coronavirus mass vaccination plans by the end of October in readiness for a possible vaccine this winter.

UK mass vaccinations



There are more than 16 million over-65s and under-fives in the UK, and a further 12.8 million people aged 50 to 64 who will be eligible for the flu vaccine in the second phase (Photo: Ian Forsyth/Getty)

Sources said GP surgeries and chemists, which currently administer flu vaccines and other inoculation programmes, do not have the capacity to cover vast numbers of the UK population for a universal coronavirus jab.

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Instead, the NHS would probably submit a Military Assistance to Civil Authorities (MACA) request to the Army's help in setting up the sites.

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NHS preparing for second spike in coronavirus cases before winter with Nightingale hospitals on standby to receive patients

The scale of the programme, potentially to cover the entire UK population of nearly 67 million, would also require military assistance with transportation, refrigeration and storage, as well as security against possible sabotage or criminal damage.

Vaccinations – which are more complex to deliver than the current Covid swab tests being offered at sites around the country – would be administered by trained nurses and, if necessary, army medics and other specialists.

The Army was drafted in to help set up the seven Nightingale field hospitals in March and April to provide extra capacity in case NHS hospitals ran out of beds to treat coronavirus patients during the first peak.

One option being considered is requesting the Army's help in delivering the annual flu vaccine to more sections of the population as a "dry run" for the coronavirus vaccine operation.

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Flu vaccines

Every year the over-65s, under-fives and pregnant women are offered flu vaccines, but this year the Health Secretary Matt Hancock has pledged a second phase of flu vaccines to the over-50s to relieve pressure on the NHS in case of a serious second wave of coronavirus which puts added strain on the NHS.

While the NHS has requested mass vaccination plans from regional planners in England, it is expected similar procedures will be followed in Scotland and Wales.

In contrast to the testing programme, which is reactive to requests for tests and has been plunged into chaos because of its ad hoc nature, local NHS bodies have access to data on how many people of each age group there are, allowing vaccine doses to be assigned to each area.

A Ministry of Defence source said a request for help had not yet been submitted but said the Army would "lean into any MACA request we do get and support things like roll-out and logistics" adding that the "Covid war is not over".

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