

Briefing

December 2021

Armed Forces healthcare briefing and latest updates on COVID-19

This monthly brief is intended to keep you up to date on the provision of NHS services for the Armed Forces community, as well as latest information and guidance relating to COVID-19.

Focus on COVID-19

Booster dose of the coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine

People aged 18 and over will be able [to book an appointment](#) for their life-saving COVID-19 booster jab from today (Wednesday 15 December) as the NHS vaccine programme extends once again.

The national booking system will open to everyone aged 18 and over who had their second dose over two months ago.

There are almost 3,000 vaccination sites across the country – 1,300 more than in February, with an additional 300 pharmacies coming online in recent weeks as the programme enters the most complex stage of the rollout.

The NHS is asking people to keep checking for appointments once the system updates, as more become available every day.

People can get their vaccine by booking online through the [National Booking Service](#) or by calling 119, and GP practices are also inviting those who are eligible.

A [guide to booster vaccination](#) provides more information on the booster dose for eligible individuals.

NHS Volunteer Responders

If you want to support the COVID-19 vaccination programme you can become an [NHS Volunteer Responder](#), they are here to help people in England to stay safe during coronavirus (COVID-19) and were set up by NHS England and NHS Improvement, working with the [Royal Voluntary Service](#) and the GoodSAM app.

This amazing team of NHS Volunteer Responders have now completed more than 2 million tasks.



There are various roles that are part of the NHS Volunteer Responders programme. All [volunteer roles](#) have been developed to ensure that volunteers can help local communities wherever they can during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Volunteers help people:

- greet and guide people at vaccination centres
- avoid busy places by collecting their shopping, medicines and other important items
- have regular contact with other people by making regular friendly phone calls
- get to medical appointments by giving lifts.

Getting support from the volunteer responder's service

The service can help anyone who lives in England and who needs to self-isolate for any reason or those who choose to stay at home as much as possible because they are cautious about going out during the coronavirus outbreak.

If you or someone you know needs support you can register by calling 0808 196 3646 (8.00am to 8.00pm, 7 days a week).

Health and wellbeing updates

Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

The service will be operational over the festive period. For service hours and contact details, please contact the [service in your region](#) for more information.

Attached to this briefing is the Op COURAGE service contact map, please share this with your networks and continue to signpost services.

Op COURAGE London and South East (Sussex Surrey and Kent) have changed their contact email address, the new email address is now: veteransservice@candi.nhs.uk

NHS support for those impacted by the 2021 Afghanistan crisis

In August 2021, the Health and Social Care Secretary [announced](#) plans to provide an additional £2.7 million for [Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service](#) to support UK Armed Forces veterans impacted by recent events in Afghanistan. This additional funding, which has been matched by £2.7 million from NHS England and NHS Improvement, is facilitating the expansion of Op COURAGE, along with providing treatment for complex mental and physical trauma, as well as alcohol and substance misuse. As part of this, care co-ordinators will act as a point of contact for veterans, helping them to navigate health and care services and liaising on their behalf with health and care professionals.

Who is this extended provision for?

Whilst Op COURAGE is available for service leavers, veterans, reservists and their families, this additional funding is specifically aimed at veterans who have served / been affected by recent events in Afghanistan; military police and interpreters who supported the UK Armed Forces in Afghanistan; and families impacted by this conflict. Events such as this can devalue the sacrifices made and exacerbate and / or trigger symptoms due to moral injury.

What are the timings for this extended service provision?

NHS England and NHS Improvement are working with Op COURAGE providers, Armed Forces charities and patient representatives to develop a service delivery model that

includes the following elements:

- Clinical assessment and treatment plan development
- Care co-ordination of complex cases
- Access to drug and alcohol misuse services
- Translator services

As part of this, longer term sustainable plans are being developed to support those impacted by the Afghanistan crisis, with enhanced service provision due to be available from March 2022 for an initial period of three years.

In the meantime and with thanks to our partners and lived experience representatives, Op COURAGE has been available for referrals since August 2021, providing mental health support to those affected by events in Afghanistan.

Further information

For further information on this increased service provision, email england.armedforceshealth@nhs.net.