

Briefing

9 April 2021

Armed Forces healthcare briefing and latest updates on COVID-19

This 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.

COVID-19 updates

The NHS continues to deliver the COVID-19 vaccination programme. Thanks to the thousands of people involved, in less than four months the health service in England has given the vital first vaccine dose to more than half the adult population.

Reports of very rare blood clots

The [Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency](#) (MHRA) is carrying out a detailed review of reports of a very rare blood clotting problem affecting a small number of people who have had the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

The problem can also happen in people who have not been vaccinated and it's not yet clear why it affects some people.

The COVID-19 vaccine can help stop you getting seriously ill or dying from coronavirus. For people aged 30 or over and those with other health conditions, the benefits of being vaccinated outweigh any risk of clotting problems.

For people under 30 without other health conditions, it's currently advised that it's preferable to have another COVID-19 vaccine instead of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine.

Call 111 immediately if you get any of these symptoms starting from around 4 days to 4 weeks after being vaccinated:

- a severe headache that is not relieved with painkillers or is getting worse
- a headache that feels worse when you lie down or bend over
- a headache that's unusual for you and occurs with blurred vision, feeling or being sick, problems speaking, weakness, drowsiness or seizures (fits)
- a rash that looks like small bruises or bleeding under the skin
- shortness of breath, chest pain, leg swelling or persistent abdominal (tummy) pain

Find out more about COVID-19 vaccination and blood clotting on [GOV.UK](#)

The British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) statement

Ramadan begins on Monday 12 April 2021, at a time when many people will be getting their second COVID-19 vaccinations, the British Islamic Medical Association (BIMA) has issued the following statement:

“Taking the COVID-19 vaccines currently licensed in the UK does not invalidate the fast, as per the opinion of Islamic scholars. Individuals should not delay their COVID-19 vaccinations on account of Ramadan.”

Information and communications resources are available from the [BIMA website](#).

Covid-19 campaign resources

As gradual easing of the current COVID-19 restrictions happen new communications materials are available on the [campaigns resource centre](#) including messaging for; Hands. Space. Face. Fresh Air campaign, Workplace Testing, Community Testing and a [British Sign Language video](#).

Armed Forces community information

Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service

In support of helping more veterans seek help from Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service, the London region has produced a series of videos with ‘[On Parade](#)’.

- Episode one: [Who are Veterans?](#)
- Episode two: [Military Culture](#)
- Episode three: [Veterans and the Criminal Justice System](#)

Two more episodes in the series will follow on 14 and 21 of April 2021.

‘On Parade’ also produce a regular chat show discussing issues facing veterans, the latest [Episode 11. Maurillia’s Story](#) is now available to watch.

Op COURAGE flexible appointments

The veterans mental health and wellbeing service continues to support veterans during the COVID-19 pandemic and offers flexible appointments to suit individual circumstances. [Contact Op COURAGE](#) in your region for more information.

Veterans Trauma Network (VTN) engagement

Following the well-received launch of Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service, feedback from several veterans and those supporting them suggested that a similar naming approach should be used for the [Veterans Trauma Network \(VTN\)](#).

NHS England and NHS Improvement would like to hear from veterans and their families, as well as colleagues working with and supporting them to take part in a small virtual focus group, completing an online questionnaire or having a one to one phone / virtual chat.

Focus groups will be held for:

- veterans who have used / are using the VTN (family members are welcome too)
- veterans who have not used the VTN (family members are welcome too)

- clinicians and staff working within a VTN
- representatives from organisations working with and supporting veterans

The engagement will launch on Monday 12 April 2021 and end on Friday 14 May 2021.

Submit your expression of interest to carrie.fleming@nhs.net if you:

- would like to take part in the engagement and state how you would like to participate, ie by focus group, questionnaire or one to one chat
- can help identify patients, veterans and their families who would like to take part in this engagement

Shell Shock livestream - Film and themed live expert panel events

Shell Shock Media CIC, in partnership with NHS Armed Forces Networks: Sussex, Kent & Medway, SSAFA and Changing Minds Changing Lives and supported by The National Lottery Community Together Fund, will be hosting an on-line adaptation of the award-winning Shell Shock play starring Tim Marriott, with a live panel session afterwards.

Upcoming event dates and live panel sessions:

- **15 April 2021** – Panel theme: Moral injury and blue-light services with expert panellists: Kelly Drewry from MIND Bluelight Programme and representatives from Kent Fire Brigade and Sussex Police.
- **20 May 2021** - Panel theme: LGBTQ+ with expert panellists: Craig and Caroline from the dedicated charity, Fighting with Pride.
- **11 June 2021** - Panel theme: Moral Injury in the armed services with expert panellists: Prof Neil Greenberg and Dr Victoria Williamson from King's Centre for Military Health Research (KCMHR).

Armed Forces Suicide Bereavement support

[Suicide Bereavement UK](#) have been commissioned by NHS England and NHS Improvement, to develop an evidence-based [Armed Forces suicide bereavement pack](#). A study will be conducted on the experiences and needs of relatives, friends and colleagues of military personnel who have died by suicide whilst serving, or after service in the Armed Forces.

For more information on the study contact: paul.igham@suicidebereavementuk.com

Exploring Military Widows' Experiences of Social Isolation and Loneliness

Northumbria University, in partnership with The War Widows Association and Forces in Mind Trust, have launched [a survey](#) to help better understand the issues of loneliness amongst widow(er)s of military personnel and veterans.