

Fraud prevention notice

Priority action	High	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Moderate	<input type="checkbox"/>	Low	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Unique Reference number	H-011-21
Date issued	20 January 2021
Subject	The private purchase of COVID-19 vaccines
Distribution list	Directors of Finance (DOFs) Local Counter Fraud Specialists (LCFS) Audit Committee Chairs (ACCs)
Relevant documents	NHS CFA COVID-19 counter fraud guidance Fraud Prevention NHS Counter Fraud Authority (cfa.nhs.uk)

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Background

The NHSCFA was alerted in January 2021 to a private company approaching various GP practices offering to give a 'donation' to charity or offering individual staff members a cash amount for 'unused' COVID-19 vaccinations. The approach was by email to the practice inbox and required a reply to advise of the availability and take up the offer. We understand that no practice took up the offer and that the approach was reported through the appropriate channels.

Further investigation into the private company indicated that they were seeking to jump the waiting list queue and immunise their own staff members for business purposes. They have since apologised and indicated that their intentions were 'misinterpreted'.

Government guidelines state that vaccinations are available from the NHS and cannot be sold privately in the UK¹.

How the fraud operates

Government states that 'the COVID-19 vaccination is only available through the NHS to eligible groups and it is a free vaccination'². As the NHS is only at the beginning of the immunisation process, the legitimate demand for the vaccine through the NHS by eligible groups will take up all the production for the foreseeable future. This means any privately paid-for access to the vaccine will likely have an element of criminality associated with obtaining and selling it.

The NHSCFA is clear that any attempt to privately purchase NHS supply, or offer private access to the vaccine is of concern for the following reasons:

- It risks establishing a black market where Government-purchased property intended for eligible groups through the NHS is sold at a profit for the benefit of criminals.
- Any unauthorized sale of COVID-19 NHS vaccines to a private company or individual would be an offence and is likely attract a range of sanctions for those involved.
- It risks undermining the public message that the vaccines are free and confuses the process, allowing fraudsters to take advantage of the vulnerable by offering 'vaccinations' and requiring payment.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-why-you-are-being-asked-to-wait/why-you-have-to-wait-for-your-covid-19-vaccine>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-vaccination-why-you-are-being-asked-to-wait/why-you-have-to-wait-for-your-covid-19-vaccine>

Prevention Advice / Action to take

To protect against this type of fraud please consider the following:

- NHS organisations and providers of NHS services should alert their staff that any approach by individuals or companies attempting to privately purchase COVID-19 vaccinations should be refused and immediately reported in accordance with the procedures outlined below.
- As the vaccine provision is extended out to other providers of NHS services and an expanded workforce is used to administer these vaccines, they should also be made aware of this information.
- NHS organisations and providers of NHS services may wish to raise awareness to the public that COVID-19 vaccinations are only available through the NHS, are not privately available and that there should be no charge for vaccinations, by using publicly available information, such as the Public Health England information leaflet [‘Why do I have to wait?’](#).
- Any approach by companies or individuals to privately purchase vaccines must be immediately brought to the attention of your Local Counter Fraud Specialist (LCFS) or reported to the NHS Fraud and Corruption Reporting Line (powered by Crimestoppers) on 0800 028 40 60 or online at <https://cfa.nhs.uk/reportfraud>

Handling information

This document may be circulated in accordance to the agreed distribution list below.

No recipient is permitted to share this document outside of their department or agency without prior permission from the author. Any further dissemination requests or feedback on this document should be directed to prevention@nhscfa.gov.uk

Internal	
Team/Individual Name	Handling Instructions
Internal business units	Official

External	
Organisation/Agency/Team/Individual	Handling Instructions
<p>Directors of Finance (DOF's)</p> <p>Local Counter Fraud Specialists (LCFS)</p> <p>All relevant NHS organisation staff and staff providing NHS services</p>	Official

Contact details

Fraud Prevention Team
NHS Counter Fraud Authority
80 London Road
London
SE1 6LH

Email: prevention@nhscfa.gov.uk

Text for publication

The information contained in this notice is Official and the prevention advice / action to take can be shared with those staff identified on the above dissemination information.