



notts

offtherails

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Vaccination and the frontline workers

Following the recent approval of the first Covid-19 vaccine came the announcement that the government will be rolling out a vaccination programme to care home residents and healthcare workers first.

Mass vaccination roll outs are intended to get the pandemic under control, prevent deaths, hospitalisations and infections. But each of these come with trade-offs in terms of who is vaccinated first, so which should be prioritised when considering public health vaccination strategies?

Currently, the government is signalling that it's starting with "prevent deaths". Care home residents are extraordinarily vulnerable to Covid-19 infections, and it's well documented that the subsequent risk of dying significantly increases with both age and the presence of other conditions.

But this strategy doesn't necessarily help to control the pandemic. Care home residents themselves don't sustain infection rates in our communities. While they're vulnerable to care staff and visitors bringing the infection to the care home, residents aren't regularly going to work, schools, and takeaways where they might pass the infection on to the general public.

Given this, it's not clear that vaccinating according to age as opposed to other characteristics will have a meaningful impact on overall infection rates. In fact, this approach may not even be effective at minimising mortality in the long term, if it leaves transmission rates high in younger groups.

Instead, in choosing to vaccinate care home residents and the elderly first, the government is leaving large numbers of frontline workers - transport staff, retail workers, teachers, and hospitality staff - vulnerable. People in these roles interact with a higher than average number of strangers during the course of the day, and can act as a significant point of transmission if they're infected.

While it's true that age correlates with the likelihood of death from Covid-19, cases such as that of Belly Mujinga, a transport worker who died of Covid-19 after being spat at by a passenger, and the thousands of people experiencing "long Covid" symptoms for months after their initial infection, show that this infection can be life-changing, no matter your age.

Vaccinating frontline workers as a priority could not only save the lives of people vaccinated, but also reduce the risk of onward spread by these workers to the public, including vulnerable individuals. Even if the vaccines

don't completely prevent infection, study data has shown that they reduce symptomatic infection, and separate studies have also demonstrated that asymptomatic people are less infectious, slowing transmission.

Choosing not to vaccinate people according to their relative likelihood of infection and transmission means that it may be some time before we see the impact of vaccination on rates of infections in the UK. Restrictions on socialising and daily life are expected to continue well into the spring to keep infection rates low. So, while care homes first may be a sensible strategy to prevent deaths and NHS overwhelm in the short term, in the mid-term it means the pandemic will likely smoulder on, and may even get worse if people get fed up with winter restrictions and are lulled into a false sense of security by the availability of a vaccine.

Vaccination strategies are not straightforward. There are no simple answers. But at the very least, frontline workers should be much further up the priority list than they currently are, if the government really wants to both "control the virus" and "save lives".

**RMT MEMBERS — REJECT
THE SC DISPUTE OFFER.**

Mind the gap

It is a depressing fact that although women are 51% of the population only 16% of the current rail workforce is female; this figure falls to a shocking 6.5% amongst train drivers.

A recent report into railway recruitment, 'Back on Track', noted that 43% of women rated flexible working opportunities as one of the top three things they look for in a job.

The unions need to push employers to allow more part time and flexible working as part of a broader campaign to reduce the gender gap in our industry.

Enhance our pay

The EMR website boasts 'enhanced cleaning' on trains but RG staff, who have been redeployed to provide that service, are wondering when they might see their pay enhanced.

Currently they receive the minimum wage on days when they clean trains but full time cleaners are on more than £10/hour. As key workers it seems only fair that 'RG cleaners' should receive the same pay for the same work.

Tier 2 representation.

On Train staff recently got an invite to join a "working group" which "aim(s) to

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look at subtle and smart changes ... that will make your day to day working a little easier and better." Sounds great but, wait a minute, read on, "This group would sit outside the normal arenas such as local/functional meetings."

Now what would this ad hoc group need to discuss that couldn't be dealt with through the currently existing long established channels involving the unions and management and how would it know what it can and can't agree to without breaking collective agreements, or maybe that's the point: For sure managers don't know them and you couldn't trust them not to take advantage of inexperienced "representatives from all grades/depots".

Management should drop this ploy to go round the unions; it is neither subtle or smart.

Cover up

Good to see that station security guards have now got the bodycams they've been promised for years; bad that it took a serious assault on one of them to achieve it. After that happened security personal were told that they should only observe and report incidents but not to get involved; we hope that continues and that the availability of body cams is not used by management to put security guards in unnecessary danger? And on the same point it is disappointing to see outsourcing company Carlisle back to its old tricks of not providing enough cover as stipulated in their own procedures; maybe that's why the risk assessment paperwork has

been removed from the office?

Best way to learn?

In these difficult times we all might feel the need to help out. The problem comes when things get back to normal and the temporary measures are still kept in place. Let's hope that train drivers being asked to do safety briefs at home as RDW won't be one of them as effective learning is much better done in a group with an instructor.



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What is Notts Off The Rails?

Notts Off The Rails is a rank-and-file socialist bulletin, published at least monthly and written by rail workers, for rail workers. It is published by the socialist group Workers' Liberty, but is produced in editorial meetings open to all rail workers. Supporters from outside the rail can help with public distribution.

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