

UK trains volunteer vaccine army in Covid inoculation race

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More used to wielding a camera than a needle, taking part in a national vaccination campaign was the "last thing" documentary director Mike Day expected to be doing before the start of the coronavirus pandemic.

But the 41-year-old is now one of an army of volunteers—many with no medical qualifications—being recruited to help deliver Prime Minister Boris Johnson's goal of vaccinating 15 million of those most at risk from the virus by mid-February.

"When I had the opportunity to do something that made a difference I definitely wanted to jump at it so I immediately signed up when I heard about it," Day told AFP at a [training session](#) for 120 volunteers at Canary Wharf in east London on Saturday.

Volunteers, wearing masks and gloves, were instructed how to administer the jab on the 32nd floor of one of the business district's skyscrapers, its windows commanding views of uninterrupted, rainswept grey skies.

"Aaah!" shouted one instructor, prompting laughter from the audience of volunteers as one participant stuck a needle into the false shoulder tied around her arm.

Another instructor from the St John Ambulance service, which specialises in first aid education, told the volunteers to push the needle "deep into the muscle".

"Without sounding too cheesy I thought this was a great opportunity to come together to help heal the world," office assistant Katherine Odell explained.

The 35-year-old said she wasn't afraid of going out to administer the shot despite the amount of information she has to assimilate.

She admitted there was "always a risk" when faced with the disease but you "keep to the rules as much as you can".

Eimear Herlihy, 31, explained she was used to seeing patients every day as a dentist.

"I'm just really eager for things to go back to normal, so any way that I can help I want to be able to help," she added.

A 19-year-old medical student at Cambridge University, Shaun Wilson said it was "exciting" to take the theory he had learned and "apply it into something that really can make a difference".

'Absolutely essential'

Volunteers from all walks of life are among the 30,000 individuals who will be recruited by St John Ambulance to administer the Pfizer-BioNTech and AstraZeneca vaccines currently authorised for general use in UK vaccination centres.

To qualify for the [volunteer](#) programme, recruits must be over the age of 18 with a [secondary school education](#) and pass a criminal background check.

In a separate room, with their chairs carefully spaced to keep to social distancing rules, another group of volunteers is learning how they will inspire confidence in those about to receive their vaccines.

They are also instructed how to wash their hands thoroughly, safely remove their [personal protective equipment](#) and give first aid.

"One of the associated risks, and a very small associated risk with vaccination, is anaphylaxis, having a severe allergic reaction," Carl Fazackerley, a St John Ambulance instructor told AFP.

"The screening will have been done by NHS colleagues before," he

added, referring to Britain's state-run National Health Service. "So this shouldn't happen, but it's about being ready to deal with it if it does."

The training day in Canary Wharf, which is replicated regularly across the UK, allows knowledge acquired during 15 hours of online courses to be put into practice. At the end of their instruction, the volunteers are immersed in a fake vaccination centre.

"Volunteers are absolutely essential to this vaccination programme because what they bring is scale and capacity," Fazackerley explained.

"The NHS is already under pressure from COVID and to ask the NHS on its own this vaccination would be an impossible task," he added.

More than 8.9 million people have already received a first dose of the [vaccine](#) in the United Kingdom, the first Western country to launch a massive vaccination campaign in early December.

However, the nation is one of the hardest hit by the pandemic with more than 106,000 deaths.

Johnson's government has set itself the goal of administering 15 million doses of the jab to all individuals over 70 years of age and caregivers by mid-February.

"The only way that we're really going to see our country come out of this pandemic and the world come out of this pandemic is vaccination," Fazackerley said.

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