



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

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The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP  
Chair, Health and Social Care Select Committee  
House of Commons  
Westminster  
SW1A 0AA

29 May 2020

Dear Jeremy,

At my appearance before the Health and Social Care Committee on 17 April, I undertook to confirm to the Committee whether the Healthcare Safety Investigations Branch (HSIB) should be involved in the investigations of the deaths of clinical staff working in the NHS who have sadly died from COVID-19.

Staff safety is critical at this time and all organisations should do all they can to keep their staff safe, while they work to protect lives. I would like to reiterate my commitment to learn how we can better to protect our frontline workers both in the NHS and in social care. This is something we owe to those of our colleagues who have given their lives in duty and in service, and to the families they have left behind.

I looked into the best approach and have set in place a process for medical examiners to review the deaths of health and social care workers from COVID-19. Whenever the medical examiner becomes aware of a health or social care worker having died with Covid-19 and believes there is reason to suspect that a staff fatality was due to the coronavirus infection acquired in the course of employment, there will be a process to notify the employer of the deceased staff member.

If an NHS worker should die as a result of exposure to coronavirus from their work and this is confirmed as the likely cause of death by a registered medical practitioner, then the employer must report this to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) in accordance with the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013 (RIDDOR). HSE reviews all reports sent to it and determines which deaths will give rise to an HSE investigation. Given this statutory independent role for HSE, I have decided to not also involve HSIB in this process.

The National Director for Patient Safety, Dr Aidan Fowler will oversee the Medical Examiner work.

Finally, there are some instances in which a COVID-19 death may be reported to the coroner, such as where the virus may have been contracted in the workplace setting. This may include frontline NHS staff. The Chief Coroner has published guidance on COVID-19 deaths and possible exposure in the workplace (Chief Coroner's Guidance No. 37).

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

**MATT HANCOCK**