



Science and Technology Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA
scitechcom@parliament.uk / 020 7219 2792

From Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Chair

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care
(By e-mail)

2 July 2020

Dear Matt,

COVID-19 antigen testing of asymptomatic cases in the health and care sectors

I am writing to you in my capacity as Chair of the Science and Technology Committee. As you are aware, my Committee has been taking evidence extensively on the COVID-19 pandemic, with one significant theme being diagnostic testing.

We know that a high proportion of people with COVID-19 are asymptomatic and therefore identifying asymptomatic carriers, particularly in high risk settings, must be a crucial component of the Government's management of the pandemic.

In a public evidence session on 1 July, Professor Sir John Bell, Regius Professor of Medicine at the University of Oxford, told the Committee that he "cannot think of any reason" not to test, regularly and routinely, in hospitals and care homes, further stating that "saturation testing in hospitals should be an absolute requirement" to prevent flare ups.

In the same session, Deputy Chief Medical Officer Professor Jonathan Van-Tam cautioned that to achieve this, testing would need to be conducted "extremely frequently" and that it would be necessary to "think very carefully" about how to do this for "2.5 million workers in our health and care sectors". Given the severe consequences of transmission in health and care settings, I would be grateful if, in response to this letter, you could set out:

- Whether the Department plans to implement regular, routine antigen testing of all health and care workers, and if not, why not?
- If yes, what assessment has been made of the frequency of testing required, and over what timeframe this regular testing will be rolled out to all workers across the health and care sectors?

I would be grateful to receive your response by Wednesday 8 July in time for the next Committee meeting. I am writing in similar terms to the Chief Medical Officer for England. I will shortly publish this letter on my Committee's website.

With best wishes,

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Chair