



Science and Technology Committee

House of Commons London SW1A 0AA

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From Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Chair

The Lord Bethell of Romford
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department of Health and Social Care
(By e-mail)

25 September 2020

Dear James,

I would like to thank you, on behalf of the Committee, for giving evidence at our public hearing on 17 September as part of our inquiry into UK Science, Research and Technology Capability and Influence in Global Disease Outbreaks. As the UK approaches a critical point in its preparations to manage the coronavirus pandemic over the autumn and winter months, it is important that the Government's actions are publicly understood. To that end we are grateful to you and your colleagues for taking the time to answer our questions.

During our discussion, I raised the point that while guidance from the World Health Organisation (WHO) on contact tracing suggests that "face-to-face contact with a case within 1 metre and for [more than] 15 mins" is sufficient to constitute potential transmission of COVID-19,¹ the Government's own guidance differs by stating that a 'contact' constitutes being "within 2 metres of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes".² Given that the NHS Covid-19 app contact tracing algorithm will function on the basis of contact within 2 metres,³ I would be grateful if you would write to the Committee to set out the following:

- what assessment has been made of the effectiveness of a contact tracing app based on a proximity of 2 metres vs 1 metre, including the potential impacts on the number of individuals who will be asked to self-isolate; and
- why the Government has decided not to base the algorithm's function in line with the aforementioned WHO guidance.

I would be grateful to receive your response by Tuesday 6 October at the latest.

With best wishes,

Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Chair

¹ <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/contact-tracing-in-the-context-of-covid-19>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person/guidance-for-contacts-of-people-with-possible-or-confirmed-coronavirus-covid-19-infection-who-do-not-live-with-the-person>

³ <https://faq.covid19.nhs.uk/article/KA-01128/en-us?parentid=CAT-01033&rootid=>