



**Department
of Health &
Social Care**

*From the Lord Bethell
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Innovation (Lords)*

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Rt Hon Greg Clark MP
Science and Technology Committee
House of Commons
SW1A 0AA

06 October 2020

Dear Greg,

NHS TEST AND TRACE

Thank you for your letter of 25 September following the Science and Technology Committee session on NHS Test and Trace on 17 September.

You asked about the World Health Organization's (WHO) advice on proximity of face-to-face contacts, how that advice compares to the government's guidance, and the effectiveness of the NHS Covid-19 App being given that it is based on alerting users who have been within 2 metres of an individual who tests positive rather than 1 metre.

For completeness, for the purposes of NHS Test and Trace, the current definition of a 'contact' includes a person who has been within 2 meters of someone who has tested positive for COVID-19 for more than 15 minutes. If identified as such, the person concerned will be contacted by NHS Test and Trace and asked to self-isolate.

Following the Prime Minister's announcement of the 1m+ guidance on 23 June, Public Health England reviewed the public health basis for this definition, to ensure it remains valid. PHE's view was that it should remain part of definition of a 'contact' for NHS Test and Trace. This is because the underlying scientific rationale for the definition has not changed:

- While face coverings and barriers can be used to reduce the risk of transmission when within 1-2 meters of someone who has the virus, those mitigations do not eliminate that risk and there is no guarantee that the mitigations will be used consistently.
- While the estimates of risk of infection at different distances vary from one study to the next, no study has reported negligible risk when people are within 1-2 meters of each other.
- Limiting contact tracing to contacts within 1 meter would therefore reduce the impact of the Test and Trace service in isolating people who have been exposed to the virus and would otherwise be at risk of passing the virus onto other people.

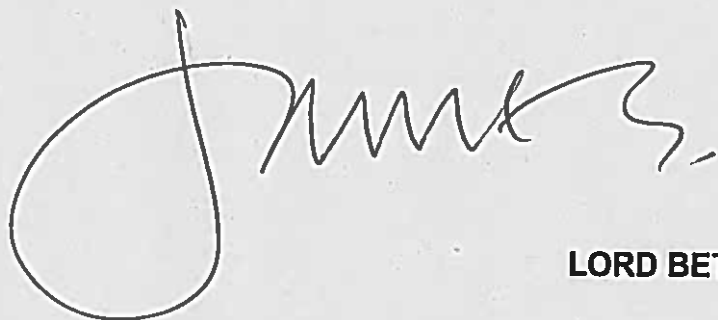
We have made clear that people should still remain 2 meters apart where possible, and where they cannot, appropriate actions should be taken to mitigate the risk of infection.

The NHS Covid-19 App is designed to send a notification if it calculates that a user has been in 'close contact' with someone who then tests positive for coronavirus. A 'close contact' generally means you have been within 2 meters of someone for 15 minutes or more. An individual who receives a message from the app to self-isolate will have been in contact with a confirmed case. Each distance measurement is an estimate and there will be occasions where the estimate is slightly over or slightly under 2 meters. However, I'd like to reassure you that these estimates are improving all the time.

As the recent increase in cases has shown it is critical that we continue to focus on reducing transmission of the virus and take sensible steps to reopen society and enable us all to start to return to normal. Scientific advice is that there is still a risk of transmission within 1-2 meters and that, where possible, people should continue to follow the 2-meter rule.

If someone tests positive for coronavirus, it remains essential that anyone who has had close recent contact with them – including contact within 2 meters for 15 minutes or more – self-isolates to help prevent the onward spread of the virus.

With my very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James', with a large, stylized initial 'J' on the left.

LORD BETHELL