



Petitions Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
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30 March 2020

Dear Matt

I am writing because of the enormous public interest in coronavirus, which has resulted in more than fifty e-petitions on coronavirus being published to date, signed by over two million people. We are receiving hundreds of petitions on coronavirus on a daily basis, which show there is a lot of anxiety and concern about the support available to people affected by the outbreak, and the Government's response to the outbreak.

Following the large number of petitions on coronavirus we asked the people who had signed these petitions what questions they most wanted answers to. On Wednesday we held an evidence session with representatives from the Department for Health and Social Care, the Department for Education, and the Department for Work and Pensions, putting many of these questions to Ministers and the Deputy Chief Medical Officer. We are extremely grateful that your Department was able to provide a representative to answer our questions, but I'm sure you will understand that there was not time to ask all of the questions that members of the public would like to be answered.

I am therefore writing to ask you to respond to the following questions, which came through most strongly from our public engagement:

Advice on social distancing and shielding

What further lockdown measures are being considered, and what conditions will result in them being brought in? How long could the restrictions go on for?

Testing and developing a vaccine

When testing capacity is increased who will testing be available for and will it be free?

Impact on vulnerable people

What support will be provided to already vulnerable people, including their children, if they become ill or have to self-isolate?

Mencap, a learning disability charity, want to know what reassurance you can give to disabled people and carers on the potential impact of the powers within the Coronavirus Bill and what impact it could have on their health and wellbeing?

Given the concern about the NICE rapid guidance on critical care, Mencap, a learning disability charity, want to know what reassurance you give that people with learning disabilities will have their right to treatment respected?

Good Things Foundation, a digital inclusion charity and Stonepillow, a homeless charity, want to know whether you agree that, after health and social care workers, those running community organisations that support vulnerable members of society should be a priority for antibody testing and PPE?

Advice and support for individuals

Will more detailed and practical guidance on self-isolation, household isolation, shielding and social distancing be provided for people in different circumstances, so they can best protect themselves and others and manage their lives while they do so?

How can people manage symptoms at home and what can they expect if they need medical care?

The Deputy Chief Medical Officer said that the Government had developed easy read guidance for people with learning disabilities about what is happening and what they need to do to protect themselves. Where can people find these resources?

What is the Government doing to ensure that all emergency and daily coronavirus briefings are accessible, including translation into British Sign Language?

Protecting keyworkers

What is being done to protect the health of keyworkers, including frontline NHS and supermarket staff?

Given the constantly evolving nature of the current situation, I would be grateful if you could provide a response to the above by Friday 3 April, so we can make these available to the public as quickly as possible.

I hope we will be able to continue the dialogue as the situation progresses and particularly as the usual parliamentary mechanisms for raising these issues have become more restricted. This might involve further sessions with Ministers and officials, and asking your Department to provide updated answers to the public's latest questions at regular intervals.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading 'Catherine' in a cursive script.

Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair of the Petitions Committee