



House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

3 November 2020

Dear Prime Minister,

Impact of Second Lockdown on Mental Health

Since your announcement on Saturday evening that England is to enter into a second national lockdown, I have been inundated with emails from constituents who are very anxious about the impact the new restrictions will have on them and their families, and particularly on their mental health.

I appreciate these concerns and would be grateful if the Government could give serious and urgent consideration to what may be possible to allow to continue during lockdown without compromising the goal of reducing the infection rate of the virus, or alternatively, which activities should be prioritised for resumption at the earliest possible opportunity.

The specific concerns that they raise are varied, however they relate to the proposal at present to prevent participation during lockdown in the activities set out below.

Places of Worship

Places of worship have made great efforts in recent months to make their premises Covid secure. Many constituents have been in contact to ask that the Government recognises the considerable effort that has gone into ensuring places of worship are safe and secure.

Many have told me that having a weekly opportunity to gather in a socially distanced way with fellow believers is critical to their health and wellbeing at what is an incredibly difficult time. They ask that Government recognises this and does what it can to allow places of worship to continue to provide this much needed lifeline, or to ensure it is reinstated at the very earliest opportunity.

Gyms, Sport and Leisure

The Government is rightly encouraging people to take their daily exercise throughout the lockdown and many constituents are therefore asking for gyms, outdoor tennis, golf and swimming pools to remain open. As I am sure you are aware, they play a very important part in helping people to maintain their physical and mental health.

Constituents point to a number of studies that show physical exercise can be a great boost to the





immune system and prevent stress. In such a worrying time, people need a viable way to stay fit. Using home equipment is just not possible for many, and during this winter period it will become increasingly difficult to exercise outdoors.

I would also add that the impact on young people in particular of sports clubs and activities being closed is significant. Swimming, gymnastics and outdoor team sports are incredibly important to children and young people's health, wellbeing and development, and the Government must prioritise their resumption above all else.

Parent and Baby Groups

Becoming a new parent can be an incredibly anxious and isolating time for new mums and dads, and this is particularly so during a pandemic.

A number of parents in Newcastle North are therefore very concerned that the new restrictions will remove this vital support network just when it has become available again. Baby classes are an educational tool providing stimulation for babies, and socially distanced support for mum and dad. Parents want to ask that the Government considers classifying baby groups and classes as Early Years Education settings so that parents can continue to access this much relied on support in the coming weeks.

The Solution: Test, Trace & Isolate

Newcastle North constituents, like everyone else in the country, have made significant sacrifices during the Covid crisis. What is therefore absolutely crucial to give hope and comfort at this time is a cast-iron commitment that the Government will not waste the time we spend in national lockdown.

Government must use this time to dramatically improve the performance of the test, trace and isolate system, or I fear we will be caught in an endless cycle of easing and reimposing restrictions until the point at which a vaccine becomes widely available, the timing of which we have no certainty of at present.

An important element of this is to involve and provide financial support to local authority public health teams. These public health professionals have invaluable knowledge and experience of their local areas that will greatly improve our collective efforts to suppress the virus.

I would also urge you to introduce regular testing for high risk workers such as frontline NHS staff, education workers, transport workers, and retail and hospitality workers, and at risk groups living in the areas with the highest infection rates.

In advance of Thursday, I would be grateful if the Government would seriously consider these issues, which are of significant concern to many of my constituents.

I look forward to hearing from you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Catherine".

Catherine McKinnell MP