

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister and First Lord of the Treasury
10 Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

9 July 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

We are writing to express our ongoing concerns regarding the impact of coronavirus on the immunocompromised, particularly in the context of the removal of restrictions on Monday 19th July. We have also recently met with Lord Bethell and Professor Jonathan Van-Tam to raise these concerns.

As you will be aware, a significant proportion of the UK's blood cancer patient community are clinically extremely vulnerable to COVID-19, due to the immune-suppressive impact of their disease or treatment. Emerging evidence suggests the vaccines are much less effective for these patients than for the general population. The announcement of easing of restrictions on 19th July, and particularly the removal of advice to wear face masks in enclosed spaces, is therefore causing significant concern and fear within the blood cancer patient community - exacerbated by rising infection rates.

It is imperative that the Government does more to support these patients. This includes ensuring that advice on how to remain safe is clear. We also would like to see an offer of full practical support as patients take action to protect themselves, to minimise the impact on their physical, mental and economic well-being.

We also urge the Government to promote consideration of this vulnerable group of patients within the general population, to encourage responsible and respectful behaviours toward those who are not protected by vaccines.

Specifically, we would like the Government to consider taking the following actions:

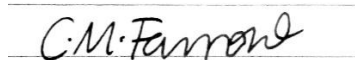
1. **Appointment of a designated clinical lead for people who are clinically vulnerable to COVID-19.** There is currently no single clinically qualified official with responsibility for people who are clinically extremely vulnerable, including those who are immunocompromised. A senior official should be appointed to lead on this issue at the earliest opportunity with the ability to provide direction across government policy areas, including health, welfare and employment.
2. **Development of a cross-government strategy for supporting people who are immunocompromised.** The Government should develop a clear strategy for supporting people who are immunocompromised over the next three years, including guidance to employers of immunocompromised people to ensure that workplaces are safe, plans for financial support when the furlough scheme ends for those who are unable to return to work safely and provision of mental health and practical support tailored to people who remain "shielding" over the long term.
3. **Communicating the ongoing risk to people who are immunocompromised.** People who are immunocompromised have not been made aware that they

are less likely to have vaccine protection against COVID-19. They are also often unclear on their employment rights and ability to make reasonable adjustments such as working from home to protect themselves. To avoid further confusion, we are calling for the government to provide clarity about the impact of the removal of legal requirements on masks and social distancing on the immunocompromised and for clear guidance to be provided for the immunocompromised. This should be matched by the provision of further guidance on the employment rights of the immunocompromised and supplemented by the NHS urgently writing to every immunocompromised person in the UK to let them know that they may not be protected and what precautions they can take.

4. **Investing in more research on vaccine efficacy and treatments against COVID-19.** There are only very limited studies looking at vaccine and treatment efficacy in people who are immunocompromised. Many conditions, including the majority of blood cancers, are not included in the main government-funded studies, with a number of completed studies not publicly available. The government also needs to support additional research and to ensure that, if shown to be effective, new COVID-19 treatments can be made as quickly as possible.
5. **Introduction or continuation of a safe hour in supermarkets.** Many blood cancer patients continue to feel vulnerable when entering a supermarket. To ease these concerns, the Government should enforce the legal requirement that all staff and customers must wear masks while in the supermarket. This could be further complemented by the introduction or continuation of a priority hour and priority delivery slots for the immunocompromised.

We would of course also be happy to meet to talk through the points raised above and look forward to hearing your response to the concerns raised.

Yours sincerely,



Caitlin Farrow

Chair

Blood Cancer Alliance

On behalf of: **ACLT, Anthony Nolan, Blood Cancer UK, CLL Support, CML Support, DKMS, Leukaemia Care, Leukaemia and Lymphoma Northern Ireland, Leukaemia Cancer Society, Leukaemia UK, Lymphoma Action, MDS UK, Myeloma UK, Race Against Blood Cancer and WMUK.**

CC: The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP – Secretary of State for Health and Social Care