

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

26<sup>th</sup> October 2021

Dear Health Secretary,

We are writing to express our ongoing concerns regarding the impact of the coronavirus on immunocompromised blood cancer patients. We are particularly concerned by recent reports that the Government is considering ending universal access to free lateral flow tests. We also believe that now is the time for the Government to commit to more rigorous measures, including mandatory face masks, in order to protect vulnerable blood cancer patients while infection rates are rising.

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. A recent trial by Kings College London revealed 57% of blood cancer patients failed to develop the effective antibodies for an immune response to the virus after their second jab. While we welcome the news that thousands of vulnerable patients could be taking ground-breaking COVID-19 antivirals this winter, this doesn't negate the need to reduce the spread of the virus which is 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. Specifically, we would like the Government to confirm and implement these measures:

- 1. Commitment to ensure the continuation of universal access to free lateral flow tests** - people who are immunocompromised such as blood cancer patients are less likely to have protection against COVID-19 and are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic. Access to free lateral flow tests not only for themselves but also for others provide blood cancer patients with comfort and certainty. The free lateral flow tests also mitigate existing financial concerns which have been exacerbated by the pandemic. Many blood cancer patients are still unable to return to work safely and following the end of the furlough scheme have found themselves financially disadvantaged. Adding a further financial burden at this time will cause great anxiety and stress. The Government should commit to ensuring the continuation of universal access to free lateral flow tests and providing further guidance to employers.
- 2. Communicating the need for immunocompromised patients to receive a third dose** – recent research from blood cancer charities has demonstrated that many immunocompromised patients have yet to be contacted about the need to book a third jab. This third dose will help increase immunocompromised patients' chances of mounting a protective immune response. The NHS and the Government must prioritise contacting these patients who are more at risk from the virus and ensure they receive priority in receiving their third jab and redouble their efforts to convince the public about the importance of a third dose. The Government must also develop a clear strategy for communicating about the


efficacy of the vaccine and length of immunity for those who have received a third dose.

- 3. Reintroduction of the mandatory wearing of face masks** - face masks can act as an important measure to help protect the most vulnerable such as blood cancer patients. To this end, we are disappointed about the Government's decision not to make face masks compulsory by law in England and are calling for the immediate reintroduction of the mandatory wearing of face masks and for the Government to be decisive in implementing the Winter Plan B. These measures will help to reduce the apprehensions many blood cancer patients are currently experiencing.
- 4. Reintroduction of social distancing measures**— social distancing measures have been demonstrated to reduce the basic reproduction number of the infection and shorten the time required for the epidemic to peak. The Government should provide clear guidance about the impact of the removal of social distancing measures on the immunocompromised and reintroduce social distancing measures to combat the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.
- 5. Communication on employment rights of the immunocompromised** – immunosuppressed patients are often unclear on their employment rights and ability to make reasonable adjustments such as working from home to protect themselves. The Government must provide provision of further guidance on the employment rights of the immunocompromised.

We hope that you find this letter of interest and the recommendations included both helpful and useful. We would of course also be happy to meet to talk through our concerns and look forward to hearing your response to the concerns raised.

Yours sincerely,

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**Caitlin Farrow**

**Chair**

**Blood Cancer Alliance Policy Group**

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.**