

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Friday 25 September 2020

Dear Constituent

Thank you for your email about the administration of vaccines.

The ongoing national response to the Covid-19 emergency is a testament to the hard work of our NHS staff, care workers, key workers, scientific researchers and all members of the public following government guidance to keep each other safe. It has also highlighted that UK based scientific research is at the forefront of global development.

This is exemplified in particular by the development of a vaccine at Oxford University. At present, that vaccine is in Phase III of its trial into the vaccine, with 8,000 volunteers participating, and reports have indicated that it is producing the right sort of immune response. I know that Kate Bingham, Chair of the UK Government Vaccine Taskforce has said that, excluding the Oxford vaccine programme, she hopes there will be a breakthrough by early 2021; Professor of Vaccinology at Oxford, Sarah Gilbert, is hopeful that the Oxford vaccine will make progress even earlier than that.

I understand that across the globe, there are 140 vaccines not yet in human trials, 19 in small-scale safety trials, 11 in expanded safety trials, and 3 in large-scale efficacy trials, including the Oxford vaccine trial. I understand that scientists worldwide are hoping to develop a coronavirus vaccine within 12 to 18 months, which would be an extraordinary achievement.

I am glad that Ministers are committed to ending the current pandemic in the safest possible manner, and I support the measures under the Coronavirus Act 2020 which reinforce and expediate this process. It is important to note that the powers granted to the Government under the Coronavirus Act 2020 are made under and subject to the restrictions of the Control of Disease Act 1984. Under the 1984 Act, Ministers have the power to make regulations which prevent danger to public health and prevent the spread of infection, but I want to assure you that these regulations do not include mandatory treatment or vaccination.

I am assured by Ministers that their priority is to ensure that a new COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective. We operate a system of informed consent – it is everyone's responsibility to seek NHS advice to get the right information to make an informed choice.

Member of Parliament for Darlington

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Instead, the Coronavirus Act 2020, a time limited, emergency act, is designed to significantly enhance our ability to respond effectively. The Act will increase the available health and social care workforce, ease the burden on frontline staff, contain and slow the spread of Covid-19 by reducing unnecessary social contacts, help manage the deceased with dignity and respect, and support individuals financially and with access to basic provisions.

I am glad that the UK Government is working with scientists and researchers to ensure that, in the event a vaccine is shown to be effective, members of the public are able to access vaccinations as soon as possible, with £47 million of Government funding initially committed to trials, and a further £84 million announced on 17 May. This additional funding will support mass production of the vaccine presently undergoing Phase 1 human trials in Oxford so that, if effective, 30 million doses can be produced for the UK by September, in partnership with Astra Zeneca. I also welcome that these vaccines will be made available for developing countries, to support them in their battles against coronavirus.

Coronavirus is the greatest challenge to our nation in a generation, but I am confident that the measures put in place will provide public bodies with the necessary support to get us through the current pandemic.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me and if I can ever be any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

Yours
Peter Gibson

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