

PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

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*Dear Constituent*

Thank you for your email about new COVID-19 restrictions.

At every stage of our fight against the COVID virus we have had to strike a fine balance between saving lives and minimising the devastating impact that restrictions have on our economy. It is because of the sense and fortitude of my constituents in Darlington, we were able to avert a catastrophe in our town, forming a human shield around the most vulnerable in our town and our exceptional health and care workers.

No Government would ever wish to curtail freedoms in the way that was necessary this year, and I certainly wish that we were not in this position. I am therefore glad that the new restrictions ensure that schools, universities and places of worship are staying open, shops can serve their customers, construction workers can go to building sites, and the vast majority of the UK economy can continue moving forwards.

The Government has been resolute to follow scientific advice throughout this pandemic. On Monday 21 September, the Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) and Chief Medical Officer (CMO) outlined the worrying rise in cases that we are currently experiencing. As they outlined, a little over a month ago around 1,000 people across the UK were testing positive for coronavirus every day. The latest figure has almost quadrupled to 3,929. The CSA and CMO warned that the doubling rate for new cases could be between seven and 20 days, with the possibility of tens of thousands of new infections next month. While they recognise that previously a large number of cases are among younger people, it is clear that the number of infections is now prevalent across all age groups. On the scientific advice, the UK's Covid alert level has now been raised from 3 to 4 – meaning that transmission is high and rising exponentially.

I am glad that the Government is taking steps now to introduce moderate new restrictions across England to achieve the maximum reduction in the R number while allowing the economy to remain open so that minimum damage is done to lives and livelihoods. I am glad that in his address on 22 September, the Prime Minister ensured the nation that while we are now asking individuals to work from home when possible, this is not a general instruction to stay at home like we saw in March during the full lockdown.

*Member of Parliament for Darlington*

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New measures will ensure that schools, colleges and universities stay open, because nothing is more important than the education, health and wellbeing of our young people. Similarly, new measures will ensure that businesses can stay open in a Covid-compliant way. However, it is important that we must take action to suppress the disease now so that stricter measures do not need to be put in place.

These new rules will only work if people comply like they did in March. There is nothing more frustrating for the vast majority who do comply—the law-abiding majority—than the sight of a few defying the rules, so I am glad that these rules will be enforced by tighter penalties. The Government has already introduced a fine of up to £10,000 for those who fail to self-isolate, and such fines will now be applied to businesses breaking Covid rules. The penalty for failing to wear a mask or breaking the rule of six will now double to £200 for a first offence. The police and local authorities will be provided with the extra funding they need, a greater police presence on our streets, and the option to draw on military support where required to free up the police.

I recognise that all this will have profound impact on the people of Darlington, so I am glad that the Government will give Members of Parliament increased opportunities to scrutinise their decisions in Parliament with more votes in the future. As you may be aware, I recently wrote a letter along with five MPs from the Tees Valley, expressing the deep reservations that we have about proposals to impose further local restrictions. I can assure you that I will continue to lobby Ministers on this matter.

After six months of restrictions and uncertainty, I would have wished that we were in a position to ease restrictions further. Unfortunately, it is vital that we act now to protect the vulnerable so that their future and our future is not jeopardised as experience the second wave of this pandemic. By acting now, I hope that we will avert the needs for more drastic action as we head towards winter.

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 sincerely*  
*Peter Gibson*

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