

# PETER GIBSON MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
LONDON SW1A 0AA

July 2021

*Dear Constituent*

Thank you for your email about the easing of lockdown restrictions.

It is thanks to our phenomenal NHS and Darlington's Primary Care Network among many others that we are vaccinating our way out of this pandemic and out of these restrictions, and I thank the army of volunteers locally at Feethams House and Darlington Arena for their services over the last six months. I am proud that 86% of UK adults have had at least one jab, and 64% have had two. We are reinforcing our vaccine wall of defence further still. I was pleased to learn that we are now reducing the dose interval for under 40s from 12 weeks to eight, which will mean that every adult should have had the chance to be double jabbed by mid-September.

I am glad that those vaccines are working. The latest data from the Office for National Statistics shows that eight in ten adults have the COVID-19 antibodies that are so important in helping our bodies to fight this disease. While among people aged over 50 - the people who got the jab earlier in the programme - that figure rises to more than nine in ten. This is a phenomenal achievement - unmatched across the G7.

Even though cases are heading upwards, in line with what the independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) expectations, hospitalisations are increasing at a much lower rate and deaths are at just 1% of the figure that we saw at the peak. The evidence is clear, our vaccines are building a wall of protection against hospitalisation.

It is my understanding that for those people who sadly do find themselves having to go to hospital, we have better treatments than ever before. Clinicians across the UK, including in Darlington's Memorial Hospital, are now using the transformative dexamethasone that has been in their effort to save lives. Taken together, the link between cases, hospitalisations and deaths is being severely weakened - this means that we can start to learn to live with COVID.

With cases expected to rise further, many people will be understandably cautious about easing restrictions. After many months of uncertainty, that is entirely natural. But we can now protect the NHS without having to go to the extraordinary lengths that we have had to over the past 16 months.

The virus is still with us; it has not gone away. The risk of a dangerous new variant that evades vaccines remains real. We know that, with COVID-19, the situation can change and it can change quickly, but we cannot put further burdens on the wellbeing of our society.

*Member of Parliament for Darlington*

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It is therefore right that we turn and face the other challenges that we know we must also address, from mental health to social care to the challenges of long COVID. The new Secretary of State for Health has outlined that he is determined to get to work on busting the backlog - the backlog that has been caused by this pandemic and which we know will sadly get a lot worse before it gets better.

I am glad that, in essence, our national response to COVID will change from one of rules and regulations to one of guidance and good sense. Ministers will revoke all social distancing guidance, including the two metre rule, except for in specific settings such as ports of entry and medical settings, where of course it would continue to make sense.

It will no longer be a legal requirement to wear face coverings in any setting, including public transport, although Ministers have rightly advised this as a voluntary measure for crowded and enclosed spaces. It will no longer be necessary to work from home. There will be no limits on the number of people we can meet. There will be no limits on the number of people who can attend life events such as weddings and funerals, and there will be no restrictions on communal worship or singing.

The Government will remove legal requirements on how businesses operate. Capacity caps will all be lifted and there will no longer be any requirement to offer table service. All businesses that were forced to close their doors will be able to open them once again. And Ministers will lift the cap on named care home visitors so that families can come together in the ways they choose to do so.

Step 4 is the next step in our country's journey out of this pandemic. I know that, after so many difficult months, it is a step that many of my constituents will be excited for, and it is one that we will all take together, with a growing wall of defence against this virus—a wall that each and every one of us can help build higher. It is vital that each of us plays our part in all settings across Darlington to protect ourselves and to protect others in the coming weeks and months.

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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