

MAYOR OF LONDON

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP

First Secretary of State
Foreign and Commonwealth Office

Date: 13 April 2020

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Department of Health and Social Care

Dear Dominic and Matt,

I have not as yet received a response to my letters of 31 March to the Health Secretary and 8 April to the First Secretary and there remain a number of urgent issues on which I am seeking urgent clarification.

1. PPE

I welcome your new three-strand plan. However, some frontline staff and organisations like the Royal College of Nursing and British Medical Association continue to say that they are unable to get what they need in a timely way, with inconsistent supply that is in danger of creating a two-tier system across the NHS and social care. This is obviously unacceptable. I would be grateful for an update on the response to the Government's appeal to UK manufacturers to re-purpose facilities to help fill this gap and on action to eliminate the inconsistency of supply to all essential parts of the frontline, including social care.

I also remain extremely concerned and frustrated over inconsistent PPE advice which has led to confusion including whether the police should wear it or not. Further changes to PPE guidance have also put additional pressure on the supply chain, as will any future extensions to recommended usage.

Here in London I have taken advice from my Statutory Health Advisor, the Regional Director of Public Health, and support the prioritisation of frontline NHS and social care staff. However, we desperately need further national advice and guidance for other frontline staff including transport workers, firefighters, police, teachers and those working with vulnerable and isolated people in communities. These all provide essential services, and many have genuine concerns about their own safety which, if not addressed, could impact their willingness to work.

Therefore, I would like you to confirm that your immediate plans will ensure both clear guidance for people working outside health and care settings and that appropriate supplies are made available for all essential workers. In addition, I would like you to confirm that you are thinking about longer-term PPE requirements and procurement, should it take considerable time to produce a vaccine.

2. Testing

I also wanted to raise the issue of testing. When I wrote to the Health Secretary on 31 March, I sought clarity on the approach to testing for key workers, and the factors that were limiting expansion of testing, highlighting that London was well-placed to support the national effort.

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I welcome the Government's recent announcement of the national Five Pillar Plan on COVID-19 testing, which commits to delivering 100,000 tests a day by the end of April. It is only through extensive testing that we will understand and combat the spread of this disease, and keep our essential services running. That means expanding testing for patients and health and care staff but also for other key workers who are working on the frontline of the response, including Transport for London operational staff. With London ahead of the curve compared to the rest of the country, much more extensive testing capacity is required as a matter of urgency, in order to support our response and enable us to move towards recovery.

London is a global leader in life sciences, and I have been pleased to see London's industry come forward to support the delivery of testing. My officers will continue to work with MedCity and the London SCG partnership to help mobilise the Five Pillar Plan in London. However, on 10 April, only 18,091 tests for the virus were undertaken nationally, in contrast to your commitment to 25,000 per day, falling far short of the levels of testing required to effectively control the virus. As a result, I am increasingly concerned by the slow rate of progress and am urgently seeking further reassurance that delays in the expansion of testing are being addressed as soon as possible, with greater clarification of how London can best contribute to this national effort.

Your testing strategy also signals the importance of securing and rolling out reliable antibody testing to identify people who have recovered from COVID-19 and may have a level of immunity. I understand Public Health England is learning from China's experience in the development of antibody assays, and that whilst these assays are useful to monitor population-level exposure, their performance is not yet good enough for diagnosing and clinical management of individuals. Therefore, I would welcome your assurance that you continue to work on developing validated, sensitive and specific antibody tests for individuals and confirmation of the timeline for this work. I would also like to know when we can expect to see the results of the population-level exposure surveys and the timeline for your plans in response to these results. I also again offer my support towards the role London's life sciences sector can play in this work.

3. Vaccine/Treatment

The development of potential vaccines and of drug treatments is vital if we are to be able to relax the lockdown for all parts of our community. I know that the scientific community is working hard to develop a successful vaccine and looking at promising existing treatments, but I would like your assessment of the progress being made in both of these areas. Learning from the experience on testing, the UK needs to be on the front foot; it would be hugely detrimental to public confidence if we found ourselves in a similar situation with respect to a vaccine. I would also like to know what plans you are developing, so that once an effective vaccine is found, we can ensure rapid production, procurement and, crucially, distribution – at scale.

4. Ventilators

I note the urgent call from the Government to industry to support an increase in the number of ventilators available to the NHS. However, I am concerned that there still remains a delay in delivery of ventilators and associated kit for London and the rest of the country, with logistical support needed to get them into all the hospitals where they are required. It has also been raised with me that some of the ventilators arriving are of a lower grade than needed for COVID-19, which is understandably causing concern amongst clinicians. I would, therefore, welcome your assurance that the additional ventilators are sufficiently high-quality to meet the needs of the NHS and its patients.

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5. Lockdown

Thank you for agreeing that the devolved administrations, including London, will be involved in decisions relating to the country's exit strategy from the current lockdown measures. There are a number of issues I will be seeking clarity on before the decision-making process begins, to ensure that we can have a fully informed discussion and reach the best possible decisions. I would like to know what reliable criteria and measurements are available to assess our progress in reducing the spread of the virus, and the likely future impact on this from each potential relaxation measure. Also, what long-term level of provision of ITU facilities is sustainable, given pressures on staff, supplies and the incremental impact of the postponement of elective operations.

Of particular importance is whether you are considering the public use of non-medical face masks and face coverings in line with other countries and any other social distancing measures, as I raised in my letter of 8 April to the First Secretary of State. I remain concerned that the UK is lagging behind the international community on this issue – just as we were slow to implement restrictions on personal movement, and as we continue to be on testing. Many international organisations, countries and cities have issued new guidance on the use of non-medical face coverings to protect others and I reiterate my ask for the UK government to do the same. In addition, I would like to know what plans can be put in place to support the vulnerable and keep them safe, including homeless people.

6. Volunteering

Finally, I want to help you in maximising the success of the volunteering campaign, ensuring that it benefits both Londoners and the nation to create a rich legacy for the future. City Hall is in daily contact with all the key infrastructure and delivery bodies in London around the volunteering effort and we have a strong understanding of the strengths and potential gaps in the system.

I understand that one of the critical constraints to the national campaign is how quick and efficient the process is to register local requirements and then match them to the relevant volunteers. I also believe that the campaign would significantly benefit from data sharing of NHS responder volunteers with local authorities. This would allow councils to generate a more accurate picture of the support NHS volunteers will provide in meeting critical need at local level.

With this in mind, I would like to offer personnel and support as appropriate, to help with making the volunteer system as efficient as possible. To discuss this initiative further, please could you ask your officials to contact Alice Wilcock, GLA Assistant Director, Team London (Volunteering), on

Irrelevant & Sensitive

I trust I will hear from you shortly on these important issues that urgently need addressing.

Yours sincerely,

Personal Data

Sadiq Khan

Mayor of London

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