



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Jo Churchill MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Prevention,
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Your Ref: PD30397

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The Rt Hon Philip Dunne MP
By email: philip.dunne.mp@parliament.uk

21 February 2021

Dear Philip,

Thank you for your correspondence of 22 January on behalf of your constituent, Mr Kester Dean, about COVID-19 and face coverings.

I was sorry to read of Mr Dean's experience and concerns. We know that people across the UK have different communication requirements, particularly those with a hearing impairment. We have published guidance on face coverings, which is available at www.gov.uk/coronavirus. In this guidance, we make it clear that some people may have a 'reasonable excuse' for not wearing face coverings, and that people do not need to prove they are exempt and should not be challenged about this.

We are also clear that people should remove their face coverings to aid communication where asked, and that those accompanying or assisting people for whom a face covering will inhibit communication are not required to wear face coverings. For example, if a person is with someone who lip reads or relies on British Sign Language (BSL) or facial expressions, they are not required to wear a face covering. It is important to continue to follow social-distancing guidance where possible in these situations.

We are running a campaign to alert the public to the places where they are required to wear a face covering, who is exempt from wearing one and how to wear one correctly, and we are providing this guidance in BSL format on social media. We are engaging with stakeholders, including disability charities, to communicate our new guidance to their members, as well as highlighting the message for the general public on social media.

Ensuring that public information on COVID-19 is accessible and reaches as many people as possible is vital. We have made sure that important health guidance is available in alternative formats, including Easy Read, BSL and audio.

The BBC News Channel broadcasts the Government's press conferences with BSL interpretations, and they are uploaded to the BBC iPlayer shortly afterwards. Since 21 May, the BBC has also made its BSL interpretation video feed available to all other broadcasters, and to the Government for use on our social media channels.

We have welcomed the many partnerships, including with disability organisations, that have helped to get critical messages and advice across.

I hope this reply reassures Mr Dean that we are treating this matter with the utmost seriousness.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of the words "Kind regards" followed by a stylized signature that appears to be "Jo Churchill".

JO CHURCHILL