



The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP
Prime Minister
10 Downing Street

13th February 2021

Dear Prime Minister

Thank you for the work you and your ministerial colleagues are doing to fight Covid. We welcome the tremendous pace of the vaccination rollout.

Covid is a serious disease and we must control it. However, just like Covid, lockdowns and restrictions cause immense social and health damage and have a huge impact on people's livelihoods.

When you said in January that together we can "reclaim our lives once and for all", you created a spirit of hope and optimism. We recognise the devastating consequences of both Covid as well as lockdowns and restrictions, and so look forward to rebuilding our society and economy as we protect the vulnerable.

The top four risk groups account for about 88% of deaths and about 55% of hospitalisations from Covid. These groups will be protected by vaccination from 8 March, so any restrictions left in place after that should be proportionate to the harm Covid is by then capable of causing. As the Health Secretary outlined in early January, this is measured by hospitalisation and death rates. It's important that these goalposts do not shift. Your roadmap must demonstrate how the vaccination rollout translates into a return to normal life. A relaxation of unnecessary restrictions must follow from 8 March. You will have our full support to do three things.

First, the "national priority" of reopening all schools to all pupils must be achieved by 8 March. Every hour of classroom learning lost harms the nation's children and the schools shutdown is having a huge impact on children's health and welfare.

Second, given the current pace of the vaccine rollout, by Easter we will have protected over two thirds of risk groups 5-9. We would therefore ask you to ensure that pubs, restaurants and other hospitality venues can open for Easter in a way which enables them to be Covid-secure but also to operate in a commercially viable manner.

We all have concerns about outside sport and swimming pools, gyms, personal care businesses, care home visits, hotels, events industry businesses, and allowing couples to get married. All restrictions remaining after 8 March should be proportionate to the ever-increasing number of people we have protected. The burden is on Ministers to demonstrate the evidence of effectiveness and proportionality with a cost-benefit analysis for each restriction, and a roadmap for when they will be removed.

Third, once all nine priority groups have been protected by the end of April, there is no justification for any legislative restrictions to remain. These groups represent 99% of Covid deaths and about 80% of hospitalisations.

Even from new strains of the virus, as vaccinologists have made clear and Ministers have agreed, the vaccine protects against death and hospitalisation. As you said earlier this week, all the vaccines "we think are effective in delivering a high degree of protection against serious illness and death, which is the most important thing".

The vaccine gives us immunity from Covid but it must also give us permanent immunity from Covid-related lockdowns and restrictions. This should be a moment of unity – for our country and our Party – as we look ahead with confidence, hope and optimism for a much brighter future, as we reclaim our lives once and for all.

Yours ever

The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP
Chair, Covid Recovery Group

Steve Baker MP
Deputy Chair, Covid Recovery Group