



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Care*

*39 Victoria Street
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PO-1247719

The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

19 October 2020

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 4 August on behalf of a number of your constituents about abortion.

Because of the unprecedented situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic, I am not able to reply to every individual letter personally.

This is not what I would wish; however, in order to prevent further delay to you, I have asked the Department's Head of Correspondence to reply on my behalf and her reply is enclosed.

I hope Ms Turner's reply is helpful.

Kind regards,

HELEN WHATELY



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Marie Turner
Head of Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: george.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

19 October 2020

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 4 August on behalf of a number of your constituents about abortion. I have been asked to reply and I apologise for the delay in doing so, which has been caused by an unprecedented volume of correspondence in recent months.

From 30 March, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care put in place a temporary measure to limit the transmission of COVID-19 and ensure continued access to abortion services during the pandemic. Eligible women and girls are able to take both pills for early medical abortion (up to ten weeks' gestation) in their own homes, following a telephone or e-consultation with a clinician, without the need to first attend a hospital or clinic.

Safeguarding and women's safety are essential components of abortion services, and the usual protocols and training remain in place. Home administration of both sets of abortion medication is subject to eligibility following a telephone or e-consultation with a clinician. Staff working in abortion clinics are very experienced and highly skilled in discussing sensitive issues with women and can pick up whether there is any coercion or other risks to the woman and will act on this.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists (RCOG) has issued clinical guidelines for healthcare professionals on COVID-19 infection and abortion care. The guidance sets out the circumstances where women should be asked to attend a clinic for an ultrasound scan; however, it states that most women can determine the gestational age of their pregnancy with reasonable accuracy by their last menstrual period alone. The RCOG guidance has recently been updated and now includes a decision aid for clinicians to use to help determine if an ultrasound scan is required.

The Government is carefully overseeing the impact of the temporary approval of home administration of both sets of abortion medication during the COVID-19 pandemic. Departmental officials have regular meetings with the RCOG, the Care Quality Commission and abortion service providers. There are a small number of incidents under investigation, although the report your constituents refer to was inaccurate. It is tragic that these two women died, but neither had been provided with both pills to take at home under the temporary COVID-19 measures.

Access to abortion is an urgent matter, as the procedure's risk increases at later gestations and there are legal gestational limits for accessing services. Importantly, public safety and continued access to key services are our priorities during this difficult period.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Turner', with a stylized, cursive script.

MARIE TURNER