



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
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The Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
By email to: George.howarth.mp@parliament.uk

11 June 2020

Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your correspondence of 20 April on behalf of a number of care home residents about personal protective equipment (PPE) for care homes. I apologise for the delay in replying. As this situation has evolved so rapidly, I hope your constituents' concerns are resolved. I hope the information included below is helpful nonetheless.

Our fantastic health and social care staff are our greatest asset. In these most difficult of times, and with ever-increasing pressures on the NHS and social care, they work incredibly hard, always putting patients and service users first and keeping them safe. We are also incredibly grateful for the thousands of staff who are bravely returning to the frontline. They will help to support our hardworking staff, save lives and help patients to recover.

We have been upfront about the challenges we face with the huge international demand for personal protective equipment (PPE), but we are committed and determined to support the health and social care sectors.

We have been working around the clock with industry and the British Army to provide the NHS and the social care sector with the equipment and support they need to tackle the COVID-19 outbreak. A new national supply and logistics network has been created from scratch in a matter of weeks to manage supply and demand across the UK, and to make sure appropriate PPE reaches those who need it.

Organisations that have an urgent clinical need for PPE but cannot get it through the usual channels can contact the National Supply Disruption Response team, which can advise on alternative suppliers or facilitate an emergency delivery, on 0800 915 9964 or at supplydisruptionservice@nhsbsa.nhs.uk. Moreover, an online PPE portal has been developed to enable primary, social, and community care providers to purchase critical PPE.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has published a UK-wide, three-strand plan to ensure that critical PPE is delivered to those on the frontline responding to the outbreak. This sets out:

- guidance on who needs PPE and when, and who does not, based on UK clinical expertise and World Health Organization (WHO) standards. This ensures workers on the frontline are able to do their jobs safely, while making sure PPE is only used when clinically necessary and is not wasted or stockpiled;
- distribution plans to ensure that those who need PPE can get it and at the right time. We are making sure that those who need critical PPE receive it as quickly as possible by setting up a new national supply system; and
- strategies to safeguard the supply of enough PPE to see us through the crisis by working alongside industry to boost future supply.

The Government has delivered millions of items of PPE to local resilience forums to help them respond to urgent local spikes in need in the adult social care system and other frontline services, where providers are unable to access PPE through their usual routes. These efforts are being coordinated across all four nations of the UK. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, over 1.6 billion pieces of PPE have been delivered across the UK to 58,000 different settings, including hospitals, hospices, care homes, home care providers, GPs, pharmacists and dentists.

We have delivered over 133 million items of PPE to social care providers, and a further 32 million items to primary care providers. Millions of these items were delivered to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The Government is also exploring opportunities to manufacture gowns in the UK, and potential alternative options to gowns.

With regard to increasing supply of PPE, the Government has received over 12,800 offers of support from suppliers and is working rapidly to assess these, ensuring they meet the safety and quality standards that our NHS and social care staff need, and to prioritise larger volumes. All suppliers making contact through the official portal will receive a response acknowledging their offer.

Lord Deighton is leading the Government effort with British industry to manufacture PPE. The Government is supporting the scale-up of engineering efforts by small companies capable of contributing to supplies. It is currently in contact with over 350 potential UK manufacturers and has taken delivery of products from new, certified UK manufacturers. Some of these organisations, including Kingfisher Group, Apple, Huawei and BP, have also generously offered their own PPE for use by the NHS and public organisations, and the Government is working with wholesalers to ensure a longer-term supply of all aspects of PPE for the health and care sectors, including gloves, aprons, face masks and hand sanitisers.

On 15 May, as part of this plan to unleash the potential of UK industry to scale up domestic PPE manufacturing, the Government announced a deal with technology company Honeywell to manufacture 70 million face masks for frontline workers. The production line will produce up to 4.5 million masks each month.

As part of the work on securing new supply lines from across the world, we have also set up a cross-Government PPE-sourcing unit, now staffed by over 400 people, with rigorous standards against which purchases will be made. We are working urgently to identify new sources of critical PPE from overseas markets, diversifying the UK's sources of supply and strengthening the UK's supply chains for the long term. Department for International Trade

and Foreign and Commonwealth Office teams around the world are seeking new supplies and helping get crucial deliveries to the UK.

I hope this reply is helpful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Helen Whately', enclosed within a light blue rectangular border.

HELEN WHATELY