



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

27th October 2020

Dear Constance,

RE: THE WEARING OF FACE COVERINGS & SUPPORT FOR THE DEAF COMMUNITY.

Thank you for your recent correspondence in respect of the wearing of face coverings and your concerns about how this impacts the deaf community. I have read your comments on this with great interest and compassion.

The Government is now recommending the use of face coverings in all enclosed spaces where you are likely to come into contact with people from outside your household. However, you are not required to wear a face covering at all times that you are in public, such as in parks or while exercising.

While I understand that the science in this area has evolved during the outbreak, the body of scientific evidence that has built up shows that the risk of transmission is made lower by wearing a face covering.

That being said, I agree it is vital to ensure that those who are deaf or hard of hearing are not isolated through face coverings preventing them from lip reading; particularly children who may not feel confident asking someone they have not heard correctly to repeat themselves. That is why I am glad that a coalition of charities, including the National Deaf Children's Society, Action on Hearing Loss and the Royal Association of Deaf People have joined forces to issue guidance on how to speak with a face mask, specifically for those working in care. These tips are:

1. Write phrases down;
2. Use a text to speak app;
3. Conduct conversations over video call, where there is no need to wear a mask;
4. Try to use a clear face mask or visor;
5. Find a quiet place to talk.



Rest assured that I will work with my colleagues in the Department of Health & Social Care to ensure that NHS staff are able to protect themselves and others from the virus without restricting communication for those who are hard of hearing or deaf. Moreover, I welcome that Government public transport guidance states that if you are travelling with, or aiding, someone who relies on lip reading to communicate, you are exempted from the requirement to wear a face mask.

However, it is of course important to keep in mind that the wearing of face coverings is in addition to the existing safety measures, including regular hand washing and observing social distancing.

Once again, thank you for having taken the time to contact me and if I can ever be of any further assistance to you then please do not hesitate to contact me again.

With best wishes,
Tom

**TOM PURSGLOVE MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT
CORBY & EAST NORTHAMPTONSHIRE**