Department of Health & Social Care

From the Lord Bethell
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Innovation

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Your Ref: BW119340/AS
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[redacted] MP
By email to: [redacted]

11 December 2020

Dear [redacted]

Thank you for your correspondence of 16 November to Matt Hancock on behalf of your constituent, [redacted], about testing for the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

From the beginning of the outbreak, our policies have been guided by the advice of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, which is led by the Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Medical Officer for England, and the response is kept under constant review.

We are not currently planning mass asymptomatic testing; swab testing people with no symptoms is not an accurate way of screening the general population, as there is a real risk of giving false reassurance. Widespread asymptomatic testing could undermine the value of testing, as there is a risk of giving misleading results. Rather, only people with COVID-19 symptoms should get tested, as [redacted] suggests.

In response to the provisions in the Coronavirus Act 2020 in relation to death certification, the General Register Office, the Home Office and the Office for National Statistics published revised guidance for medical practitioners completing medical certificate cause of death (MCCD) during a period of emergency. Medical practitioners are expected to state the cause of death to the best of their knowledge and belief. The guidance confirms that COVID-19 is an acceptable direct or underlying cause of death for the purposes of completing the MCCD. The full guidance can be found at www.gov.uk by searching for 'guidance notes for completing medical certificate cause of death'.

The MCCD is set out in two parts, in accordance with World Health Organization recommendations in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems. Part one starts with the immediate, direct cause of death, going back through the sequence of events or conditions that led to death on subsequent lines, until reaching the one that started the fatal sequence. Part two should include any other diseases, injuries, conditions or events that contributed to the death, but were not part of the direct sequence.

For more information, [redacted], or you on their behalf, may wish to contact the GRO as it best placed to respond. Its contact details can be found at www.gov.uk/general-register-office.

I hope this reply is helpful.

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LORD BETHELL