



**Chris Heaton-Harris**  
Member of Parliament for Daventry  
House of Commons, London SW1A  
0AA  
Tel: 020 7219 7048

February 2021

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about dementia and coronavirus.

I know how challenging it is for families caring for loved ones during this difficult time, particularly those who have needed to take on extra responsibilities. The Government is working closely with system partners, stakeholders, local authorities and the care sector to monitor the impact of COVID-19 on people with dementia and to identify what additional actions may be required to ensure safety, and access to the right support and care.

In addition, research through the National Institute for Health Research was commissioned on how to manage or mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on people with dementia and their carers living in the community. The research has considered the best ways to support people to stay well during the outbreak, including help to manage the psychological and social impacts of social distancing, self-isolation, and lockdown. You can find more information, including summary leaflets, here:

<http://www.idealproject.org.uk/covid/>

Of course, visiting is a central part of care home life and it is crucially important for maintaining health and wellbeing and quality of life for residents, but there is a balance to strike. The Government's aim throughout this pandemic has been to keep people in care homes safe and well.

Welcoming people into care homes from the community inevitably brings infection risk. Scientists have confirmed that the new variant of COVID-19 is between 50% and 70% more transmissible. With this new variant spreading rapidly across the country, additional restrictions are unfortunately needed across all aspects of our life, including in care homes, which means that close-contact indoor visits to care homes are no longer allowed. However, visits to care homes can take place with arrangements such as substantial screens, visiting pods, or behind windows, and visiting a care home is listed as a "reasonable excuse" to leave your home. No visits will be permitted in the event of an outbreak within the care home.

I know this is a frustrating time, but we now can see that there is an end in sight. The biggest vaccination rollout in our history is ongoing and I am encouraged that the NHS's reasonable expectation is that by the middle of February, should all go well, the first vaccine dose will have been offered to everyone in the four top priority groups. I am encouraged that the vaccine has now been offered to residents at all eligible care homes, which is an important step towards making it safe to allow visits again.

I share the Government's commitment to bringing an end to the pain of separation and to help care homes bring families and loved ones together. Recognising the importance of visiting for the wellbeing of residents and those who visit them, I know that the Government is working to enable more visiting in care homes as soon as it is safe to do so.

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The vaccine has been shown to be both safe and effective, and as such I urge everyone to get vaccinated, but an employer cannot force employees to receive the vaccine.

The Government has stated that the priority now is rolling out the vaccine to those who need it the most as quickly as possible. While I understand that a range of options are being considered to encourage people to receive the vaccine, the Government does not plan to make the COVID-19 vaccination mandatory.

I agree that we should do everything we can to offer support to people with long term health conditions, as well as those who support them, throughout this difficult time, and I will certainly continue to monitor this issue closely.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Chris'.

**CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP**  
**MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY**