



Chris Heaton-Harris
Member of Parliament for Daventry
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Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about the emergency legislation relating to the Government's response to coronavirus.

All the measures in the Coronavirus Act are temporary and proportionate to the threat we face. It is important that they will only be used when strictly necessary and will only be in place for as long as required to respond to the situation. Also, there are measures in place to review this act on a six-monthly basis, to ensure that the measures remain appropriate. The virus will be with us for some time, and it is vital that we are able to take necessary steps to save lives.

The purpose of the legislation is to ensure that sufficient staff are available, and deployed where they are most needed, as well as supporting members of the public, containing and slowing the virus, and managing the deceased with respect and dignity.

Further, the Act provides indemnity for clinical negligence liabilities arising from NHS activities carried out for the purposes of dealing with, or because of, the coronavirus outbreak, where there is no existing indemnity arrangement in place. This ensures that those providing healthcare service activity across the UK are legally protected for the work they are required to undertake as part of the COVID-19 response.

The Government has sought to offer Parliament additional scrutiny, offering MPs a vote on changes to regulations wherever that is possible, on England- or UK-wide measures before they come into place. I agree that it is vital for actions to be taken as swiftly as possible in the fight against coronavirus, but I also believe it is important that Parliament has additional opportunities to thoroughly examine new measures before they are put in place wherever that can be achieved.

As part of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) (No.3) Regulations 2020, local authorities, local authorities were empowered to close or limit access to premises or outdoor spaces in their area to prevent the spread of coronavirus, including stopping events. These regulations passed through Parliament, following a lengthy debate, and I believe that this constitutes appropriate scrutiny. This extension was necessary to enable the continuation of lockdown restrictions, as the powers were due to expire in mid-January.

While I am hopeful that the progress of vaccinations will enable a lifting of restrictions before long, we must be cautious about planning for the release of restrictions, and that it is prudent to empower local authorities to act quickly in the event of a further resurgence of cases. The presence of these powers does not mean that they will be used, it simply means that restrictions can be put into place if required.



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I completely appreciate your concerns about the power conferred by the Coronavirus Act relating to people who may be infectious. I know that most people have been working extremely hard, and making numerous sacrifices, to comply with relevant public health advice. This provision simply seeks to ensure that isolation measures can be enforced if necessary. In practice, this power would take the form of a public health officer or police officer returning people to places that they have been required to stay. For example, if someone has been contacted by NHS Test and Trace and required to self-isolate for 14 days, and then is found out and about during that time, they would be returned home. Equally, the act empowers police and immigration officers to make sure that individuals attend testing or treatment facilities as required.

I understand that these measures may seem intimidating, and I know that the overwhelming majority of people are following guidance and obeying self-isolation instructions. However, we must be prepared to enforce these measures, to ensure that the small number of people who do not comply are not putting lives at risk by their behaviour.

I will continue to monitor this issue and scrutinise the steps the Government is taking closely.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY