Letter to all MPs and Peers 07 February 2020

Dear Colleague

**UPDATE ON WUHAN CORONAVIRUS**

I am writing to update you on the ongoing situation with the Wuhan coronavirus and the steps we are taking to ensure the safety of the public across the country.

The NHS is well prepared to deal with incidents like this and we have a clear plan which we are working on to protect the public, with a belt and braces approach. On Friday 31 January the Chief Medical Officer announced that two patients in England - who are members of the same family - tested positive for Wuhan coronavirus. They were transferred to a specialist unit in Newcastle, where they are in quarantine being cared for by expert staff. People with whom they had close contact with are being contacted and advised on what to do.

You may have also seen that a further patient in England has tested positive for Wuhan coronavirus today. The individual did not acquire the disease in the UK. The patient is being transferred to a specialist NHS centre, and again we are using robust infection control measures to prevent any possible further spread of the virus. The NHS is well prepared to manage these cases and we are now working quickly to identify any contacts the patient has had.

The World Health Organisation has now declared the situation a public health emergency of international concern and the UK Chief Medical Officers have raised the risk to the UK from ‘low’ to ‘moderate’. This decision was based on the World Health Organization’s advice, as well as a thorough assessment by the UK CMOs, Public Health England as well as prior advice from the Scientific Advisory Groups for Emergencies.

You will no doubt have seen the efforts we have made to return British nationals who were in Wuhan. Last Friday, a Foreign Office-chartered aircraft carrying 83 British nationals arrived in the UK from Wuhan. We followed this up with a further 11 people who returned via France. A further flight is planned for the weekend.

This has been a considerable logistical effort. Returned UK nationals have been transferred to off-site NHS accommodation at Arrowe Park Hospital on the Wirral, where they will spend 14 days in supported isolation as a precautionary measure. There they have access to a specialist medical team who will regularly assess any symptoms.

On existing evidence, most cases of Coronavirus are mild and most people recover. Nevertheless, anyone who has travelled from Wuhan or Hubei province in the last 14 days should immediately contact NHS 111 to inform them of their recent travel; should stay indoors and should avoid contact with other people even if there are no symptoms.

Anyone who has travelled to the UK from mainland China, Thailand, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia or Macau in the last 14 days and is experiencing cough, fever, shortness of breath, should self-isolate and call NHS 111, even if symptoms are mild.

The UK is playing a leading role in combatting the virus. We are one of the first countries in the world to develop a new test for the virus. Earlier this week I announced that we are making £20m available to the global Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, to speed up development of a vaccine against the coronavirus, and a further £20m for UK research.

Public Health England has sequenced the viral genome from the first two positive cases in the UK, and has made that sequence available to the scientific community.

We’ve also launched a public information campaign setting out how every member of the public, including members of this House, can help by taking simple steps to minimise the risk to themselves and their families. A copy of the information and accompanying video is available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-public-information-campaign-launched-across-the-uk>

The number of cases is doubling globally around every five days and it is clear that the virus will be with us for at least some months to come. Tackling this will be a marathon not a sprint.

Please be assured that we are working night and day based on our plans for a comprehensive approach that puts public protection as the absolute top priority.

IF you have any questions please contact me, Jo Churchill or my PPS, Gillian Keegan.

Yours ever,



**MATT HANCOCK**