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Nadhim Zahawi MP
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

By email

Dear Mr Zahawi

Let me begin by congratulating you on being appointed as the minister responsible for the roll-out of the Covid-19 vaccination programme. We join the government in celebrating the extraordinary and dedicated work of scientists in developing these life-saving vaccines and wish you well for this vital task.

I am writing now with some suggestions for how distribution of the vaccine might be prioritised.

First, we support the primary commitment to public health and the impulse to inoculate those most at risk first, but we believe that more variables than age alone, such as a person's vulnerability to catching the virus, should be taken into consideration.

We commend the decision to offer a vaccine to frontline health workers as a priority but would remind you about the many other frontline workers on whom we depend including teachers, public transport workers, shop-workers, and those who deliver our goods and collect our rubbish. Many of these people who have been keeping society going may have health conditions that make them especially vulnerable to Covid and they have all been risking their lives for the common good. They should receive greater priority when it comes to health protection.

I would draw your attention to a letter in the BMJ that noted

'Trust in COVID-19 policies adopted by the UK and US governments has frequently been lacking. Ignoring the occupational health and safety and related public health consequences of some workers being given low vaccination priority will be unwise and perhaps indicative of a general UK neglect of occupational health and safety during and before the pandemic.'

The letter also notes that pre-existing global principles and frameworks on vaccine prioritisation and the specific guidance from the WHO for the Covid-19 vaccine both suggesting balancing age-related vulnerabilities against risk acquired through socially essential work and we would ask you to follow this balance when designing the programme for vaccine rollout.

Thanks to the extraordinary work of our scientists it seems that the UK is likely to be in a position to show global leadership in determining an effective, equitable and balanced approach to vaccine prioritisation. We would request that you take the considerations raised here into account when making these vital decisions.

With best regards,

Larry Sanders

Health spokesperson of the Green Party of England and Wales

'Rapid Response: Covid-19 vaccine prioritisation in the UK and workers beyond health and social care who may go missing' Letter to the BMJ from Andrew Watterson, Professor of Health, University of Stirling