

Press release on behalf of Keep Our NHS Public - for IMMEDIATE use

NHS Staff, MPs and Campaigners to deliver petition to Downing Street calling for re-introduction of free Covid testing

Next week on Monday 20th June, NHS staff and health campaigners [1] together with several MPs from across political parties [2], will hand deliver a petition of over 380,000 signatures [3] to Downing Street. The petition calls on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to reinstate free Covid tests for all and encourage isolation for those with a positive test, including the necessary support such as sick pay.

NHS staff, MPs and campaigners will assemble outside the gates of 10 Downing Street in Whitehall at 2:45pm on Monday 20th June for photographs, before then proceeding to 10 Downing Street to formally deliver the petition in several large marked boxes.

There are still around 50 people a day dying of Covid and around 5,500 hospital in-patients with the virus [4], whilst two million people continue to suffer with Long Covid [5]. A new wave of Omicron is widely predicted imminently. Both NHS staff and campaigners believe that reintroducing supportive measures and access to free testing is urgently needed to avert another damaging wave of significant infection, and increased pressure on an already struggling NHS.

Dr John Puntis, Co-Chair of *Keep Our NHS Public* who started this petition, says:

"The government must take some responsibility for the current level of infection, and a predicted new wave. Pretending it has gone away and relying exclusively on the vaccine puts lives at risk and further burdens an NHS on the brink. To live with Covid we need not only vaccination but access to frequent free testing, clean air (e.g. air filtration systems), high grade masks and social distancing where possible. Restoring free lateral flow tests and encouraging self-isolation would help decrease viral spread and protect against new variants and further surges as well as decreasing the risk of long Covid – a massive problem that is proving debilitating for many."

Caroline Lucas, Green party MP for Brighton Pavilion, says:

"It's utterly absurd that the Government has scrapped free Covid lateral flow testing, when at the moment over 10,000 people are still being infected daily. Learning to 'live with Covid' can't mean simply burying heads in the sand and pretending the virus doesn't exist. We need to see an immediate reversal of this decision."

[ends]

For interview, further information and logistics ahead of the day please contact Press and Media Officer for *Keep Our NHS Public*, Samantha Wathen on 0777 6047472 or email press@keepournhspublic.com

On the day logistics: Please contact Lewis Baker (Campaigns officer for Keep Our NHS Public) on: 07455219308

Notes to editors

1. Present to deliver the petition will be: Dr John Puntis (Co-chair of *Keep Our NHS Public* and petition starter) Dr Tony O'Sullivan (Co-chair of *Keep Our NHS Public* and retired Consultant Paediatrician) Dr Louise Irvine (GP) Nurse Holly Johnston, Dr Andrew Meyerson (A&E Doctor) and Alia Butt (NHS Psychotherapist)
2. MPs participating in the action confirmed so far are: Mary Foy (Labour MP for City of Durham) Caroline Lucas TBC (Green MP for Brighton Pavilion) Kate Osborne (Labour MP for Jarrow) Martyn Day (SNP) Nadia Whittome (Labour MP for Nottingham East) Mick Whitley (Labour MP for Birkenhead) Charlotte Nichols (Labour MP Warrington North)
3. Petition on Change.org: 'Boris Johnson: Don't scrap free Covid testing and isolation!' <https://www.change.org/p/boris-johnson-don-t-scrap-free-covid-testing-and-isolation>
4. <https://coronavirus.data.gov.uk/details/healthcare>
5. <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/conditionsanddiseases/bulletins/prevalenceofongoingsymptomsfollowingcoronaviruscovid19infectionintheuk/1june2022>