



Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Department of Health & Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Leader's Office
Perceval House
14/16 Uxbridge Road
London W5 2HL

 : @_petermason
Mob : 07814 026 781
Tel: 0208 825 6833
Email : masonpe@ealing.gov.uk

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Dear Secretary of State,

We are writing to set out the need for urgent and targeted action in Ealing to prevent the further spread of the B.1.617.2 variant of concern, to avoid the exacerbation of ethnic and economic inequalities and to sustain community engagement in tackling Covid and the variants of concern.

There are currently a number of B.1.617.2 cases identified in the borough of Ealing. We all know from experience in other areas, such as Bolton, how rapidly these case numbers can grow. Ealing's cases are overwhelmingly concentrated in some of the most economically deprived areas in the west and north of the borough.

Ealing Council's Public Health team yesterday submitted an action plan, consisting of a range of targeted, urgent steps to curtail the spread. We wholeheartedly endorse this plan and are asking you today to act to ensure that this plan is approved and the necessary resources are released to enable us to get to work urgently.

Ealing's plan consists of the following key elements:

- **Surge vaccinations:** a rapid increase in the number of local residents being vaccinated is essential to reducing the spread of variants of concern. We urgently need to deploy surge vaccinations to the most affected areas of the borough and to be able to vaccinate younger people living in multi-generational households. In these areas there remain very significant numbers of residents, including in the vulnerable categories, who have not been vaccinated, including in the substantial hidden and unregistered populations. We know there is huge appetite and demand for vaccinations in our borough – a recent visit by a drop-in vaccine bus to Southall was significantly oversubscribed, with over 500 residents turning up. **We need the vaccines, clinical staff and facilities to undertake targeted, surge vaccinations, and for DHSC to authorise vaccinations for younger**



people living in multi-generational households to protect the whole household.

- **Self-isolation support:** throughout the pandemic, it has been very clear that the levels of self-isolation support are too low, and the eligibility too restricted, to enable many people not to go into work after testing positive or coming into contact with a positive case. This is particularly the case in areas such as Southall where many residents are in low-paid and insecure work, and where the nature of the local economy means relatively few residents can work from home. For too many local residents, self-isolating means losing out financially, or ignoring the requirement to self-isolate so as to keep an income coming in. **With variant of concern cases rising rapidly in low-income areas of Ealing, higher self-isolation payments with wider eligibility need to be made available in order to enable everyone who needs to self-isolate to do so and to prevent the exacerbation of income inequalities.**
- **Asymptomatic targeted testing in schools:** several of the cases of the variant of concern have occurred in local schools. To contain the spread, keep students, staff and their families safe, and help ensure schools remain open, we need to be able to undertake phased targeted testing across schools in the west and north of the borough. **We urgently need the resources to provide home testing kits through schools, mobile or on-site testing facilities for secondary schools in high prevalence areas, and translated materials to assist families to register and undertake tests.**
- **Community and setting-specific asymptomatic testing:** to identify and control the spread of the variant of concern, we need to target community asymptomatic testing in areas and settings of high prevalence or risk, making testing easy to access via mobile or roving testing units, and making PCR tests available through vaccination sites. Engagement with residents through wide-ranging testing will also enable us to use the opportunity to encourage take up of vaccination. **We urgently need the resources to begin rolling out a surge asymptomatic testing programme.**
- **Build community engagement:** to ensure that efforts to tackle the variant of concern are as effective as possible, we will need to undertake widespread community engagement through faith settings, education settings, building on existing community networks, borough wide and targeted communications, aimed at most at-risk communities. **We urgently need the resources, along with outreach staff from the Cabinet Office or equivalent to enable us to undertake this large-scale work.**



As a borough we have made huge progress in tackling Covid-19, after a very difficult period earlier in the year. However, the B.1.617.2 variant threatens to undo much of that work. With prevalence highest in the most deprived and most ethnically diverse areas of the borough, a resurgence in Covid through the variant of concern would be likely to have a disproportionate impact on economic and ethnic inequality.

We want to act fast to stem the growth of the variant in Ealing. We have set out an ambitious plan to do so. We would ask that our action plan is quickly approved and the resources we need are allocated to the borough.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Peter Mason
Leader, London Borough of Ealing

Cllr Josh Blacker
Cabinet Member for Healthy Lives