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**Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP**

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
Department for Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

26 June 2020

Dear Matt,

**Re. importance of clear and consistent communication from the UK Government – social distancing and easing of lockdown**

I am writing ahead of the UK Government's next phase of easing lockdown on 4<sup>th</sup> July, aimed at allowing a 'return life to as near normal as we can'. The BMA has been clear that in the next phase of managing the pandemic, the priority must be the continued protection of the public's health – maintaining the suppression of COVID-19 – whilst resuming economic and social activity.

As you will be aware, there are still significant circulating levels of the virus, with numbers of new cases (from those tested) at over 1000 daily – significantly higher than comparator EU nations. It is vital that in easing the lockdown, all efforts must be made to mitigate against further spread and outbreaks, and at worst a second spike which could overwhelm the NHS should it coincide with the winter months.

To keep the virus under control, it is imperative that there is absolute clarity of the Government's public health guidance on measures that must be adhered to in order to minimise the spread of infection, as ways of life that have been on hold start to resume. Social distancing has been relaxed to "1 metre plus", however, it is unclear as to what the "plus" refers to. It is likely that the public will simply assume that social distancing has been reduced to 1 metre. Neither has there been any clarity regarding ensuring "COVID secure" arrangements in public areas such as restaurants, bars and cinemas. The BMA has already called for the wearing of face coverings in all public places where social distancing is not possible – a norm in many other nations - yet in the UK this only applies to public transport.

Given the summer season and many months of a strict lockdown, it is understandable that people will want to travel to tourist areas in the UK for a break and relaxation. The BMA has today published 'tourism in the time of COVID-19', as attached, setting out our principles for a responsible 'new normal' for travel to tourist areas within the country. However, it is also recognised that tourism within England should only be encouraged if it is undertaken with the suppression of viral transmission as a key safety principle, and we have grave concerns that the UK Government has not been clear or consistent in its instructions to the public on this point.

**Chief executive officer:** Tom Grinyer

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As holidaymakers in England plan their upcoming holidays, we have set out the precautions we believe they should take to minimise the further risk of spreading COVID-19 when domestic tourism restarts. As households travel around the UK, if social distancing and infection control is not respected, there is a strong possibility that local COVID-19 outbreaks could occur – straining already stretched NHS services, and worse could spread nationally

That concern has been brought to the fore by worrying images of popular hotspots in England being inundated with crowds in the warm weather. From the photographs of packed beaches in Bournemouth, which led to Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council declaring it a ‘major incident’, it is clear that the UK Government’s 1 metre plus social distancing rule is not being followed.

Whilst it is right that the Government says people should be ‘trusted to continue acting responsibly’, this should not confer the weight of responsibility on their shoulders. The Government must take responsibility to issue clear and consistent communication of the guidance on what is, and is not, safe to do as well as put in place all necessary measures in order to ensure public safety.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chaand Nagpaul'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C' and 'N'.

**Dr Chaand Nagpaul CBE**  
BMA Council Chair