

As you can imagine, I have had a great number of emails over the last week on the issue of Covid rules, both in terms of new rules from masks to mandatory vaccines, and concerns over rule breaking by Downing Street. I thought it would be helpful to outline my full views on this subject. This is a lengthy note, because the position is not straightforward. I am more of a practical person and therefore want to be comprehensive with my views and open with the people of Clacton.

On the so called "Plan B" rules, I am relaxed at needing to return to mask wearing as we assess the risk of this new variant – after all, it is no great imposition and we must never return to lockdown! So, I will support the government on the issue of mask wearing. I can accept that some protections need to be in place whilst we investigate the Omicron variant, and the option to work from home is a sensible measure to put in place at this time. I currently have two members of my staff who are unwell with Covid and I have just recovered from Covid myself, so I am not of the opinion that we should do nothing.

However, domestic vaccine passports are another matter totally. I will vote against the Government on this issue for two key reasons. Firstly, as a principle, we should be careful of how much we infringe on people's liberty. I don't want Britain to become a state where carrying of passports becomes routine. I believe that freedom is at the heart of our national identity. Secondly, as a matter of practicality, can we really expect venues which have had an incredibly difficult time during lockdown to now police this type of compliance? No, I think not. Having worked in the performing arts for most of my life, I know they do not have the capacity to police these restrictions.

Let me now address the issue of so called "mandatory vaccines". I will never support forcing people to have any manner of medical intervention. This certainly is not the government's position either! However, there is a grey area in terms of issues like employment in the NHS. As my wife works in a care home, I am well informed and have strong views on this. I think it is quite acceptable to expect people, who want to work on the health front line with the vulnerable, to be vaccinated to minimise any risk. I understand the argument that this could act as a deterrent to working in the NHS, but I feel that isn't a real issue as most people who work in health and care are fully aware of how important it is to get the jab to protect others who are most at risk.

I will now turn to the allegations of Covid rule breaking within Downing Street. I understand your concerns, but I am assured by colleagues that Covid guidance has been followed at all times. However, as you will be aware, the Prime Minister has now asked the Cabinet Secretary to thoroughly investigate this matter and I hope that we will quickly see the results of that. Like you, I had a very restricted Christmas last year. I did this to keep my neighbours and loved ones safe, so the idea that anyone in power breached this makes my blood boil. I called for Dominic Cummings to resign last year when he was in breach, so I am more than happy to challenge the powers that be. We all know that there were many examples of rule breaking last year across the country, but those that make the rules should not break them. Should any contravention of the rules be uncovered, I believe that it should be called out and those responsible held to account, however, unlike certain bias media commentators, I will not jump to judgement before seeing the results of an independent investigation.

Finally, make sure you get your booster! The local NHS has worked their socks off, and I know there have been teething issues, but I have been passing local feedback to them and we are really making great progress. See here the latest arrangements we have for jabs locally - <https://sneevaccine.org.uk/>

📄

Keep up to date on the latest rules and changes at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/covid-19-coronavirus-restrictions-what-you-can-and-cannot-do>

I hope that this helps to sum up my views. Allow me to also wish you a very merry and safe Christmas!