



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Kwasi Kwarteng MP
Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

Our Ref: SO16978

12 July 2021

Dear Kwasi,

Re: Giving businesses the legal right to require customers to wear face masks on their premises

Over the past year, businesses across the country have struggled through an unprecedented period of uncertainty. As a result of the pandemic, our high streets have lost too many treasured businesses, people have lost their jobs, and business owners have lost their livelihoods which they have worked so hard for.

The lack of clear Government guidance and long-term strategy throughout the pandemic has made the situation even harder for small businesses struggling to survive. It is therefore unfortunate to see history repeating itself with the latest Government rules on face masks after July 19th.

Since the Secretary of State for Health and the Prime Minister updated the country on plans to ease restrictions, business owners have watched as different Ministers give a different answer each day on guidance for face masks in public spaces.

For small businesses, their customers and their employees, this is yet again more unnecessary uncertainty.

It is clear that businesses, particularly small businesses in sectors such as retail, transport and hospitality, want to be reassured that they can set the Covid-safety rules that suit them and those they work with. For many, this will mean being able to require customers to wear a face mask.

Meanwhile, many shoppers will want to know what Covid-safety rules are in place in each business, so they can make an informed decision about their safety and shop with confidence.

Giving firms the right to require customers to wear face masks in confined indoor spaces is vital to protect staff, in particular the millions of young people who have not received their second jab, and the clinically vulnerable who have been shielded from the virus.

Employers are rightly concerned about protecting their workers' health, but feel powerless to enforce mandatory face masks on their premises. And they are equally worried that due to the lack of clear rules, they could be held responsible if a client or employee falls ill with Covid after contracting the virus on their premises.

It is right that people with medical conditions stay exempt from wearing masks, and it is also right that businesses are safe for staff to work and customers to shop in.

I therefore ask that the Government gives business the legal right to require customers to wear face masks on their premises, whilst continuing to allow those with medical conditions to be exempt.

Lastly, countless employees are worried that their employer could threaten to fire them if they don't yet feel safe to return to the office. This is deeply unfair and threatens workers' job security and health, especially as millions are yet to be vaccinated or receive their second dose. The Government must urgently make clear that those able to work remotely should be free to do so if they are worried about their health.

A business should be allowed to protect the safety of its customers and staff during a pandemic. For that reason I urge you to seriously consider the above proposals.

I look forward to your response,

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sarah Olney".

Sarah Olney
Member of Parliament for Richmond Park

CC. Secretary of State for Health and Social Care