

Nadhim Zahawi MP  
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for COVID Vaccine  
Deployment  
Department of Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

The Fostering Network  
87 Blackfriars Road  
London  
SE1 8HA

Wednesday 2 December 2020

Dear Minister

I am writing to congratulate you on your vital new role as Minister for Vaccines. You will remember that we met several times when you were the Children's Minister at Department for Education. Your personal interest and support for the work of foster carers was deeply appreciated at that time. You may well remember visiting one of our award-winning Mockingbird hubs when you were introduced to a group of foster carers providing peer support to each other.

I am contacting you in your new role to ask you to ensure that the 71,150 foster carers in England are prioritised in the roll out of the Covid 19 vaccination programme.

Throughout the pandemic, the Government have taken steps to ensure foster carers can continue to care for children, such as giving foster carers access to priority testing.

We are now receiving regular reports from local authorities in our membership that they are currently struggling to place children in foster care, and this is directly due to the pandemic. Fostering services have asked us to specifically raise with you the importance of rolling out the vaccine to foster carers urgently.

There are three fundamental reasons why we wish you to consider this request as a matter of priority:

- Foster carers are required to meet social workers and other professionals as part of the care they offer to young people. Most fostered children also meet with birth families on a regular basis to ensure contact is maintained. As a result, many foster carers and their families are exposed to multiple households in their fostering role which increases the risk of contracting the virus.



- The foster care workforce is an older population. The latest Ofsted statistics show that as of 31 March 2020, 65 per cent of foster carers were over 50 years old and 25 per cent were over 60. As the risk from coronavirus increases with age, foster carers are at a raised risk and should be protected as far as is possible to ensure it is safe for them to continue to foster.
- As part of the social care workforce, foster carers care for the vast majority of children in care. The numbers of children entering the care system has increased dramatically in the last few years. It is vital to recruit and retain foster carers across England to ensure we provide loving and stable homes for children and young people who can no longer live with their own families. We are very concerned about the many pressures that foster carers face. This has undoubtedly increased as a result of the pandemic and we cannot afford to see a further drop in the number of foster carers who are willing to provide a home for our most vulnerable children.

There is no doubt that prioritising foster carers for the coronavirus vaccine would ensure we protect the health of one of the most critical groups in society. Foster carers perform a vital role we simply cannot do without. Awarding priority status would also represent a huge morale boost to foster families across the country and would be warmly welcomed by The Fostering Network.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes

Kevin Williams

Chief Executive

The Fostering Network

CC: Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families