



## CATHERINE WEST MP

*Member of Parliament for Hornsey and Wood Green*

The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London  
SW1A 2AA

16 February 2021

Dear Prime Minister,

I am writing as Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Swimming to encourage you to recognise the essential nature of swimming pools for the nation's physical and mental health and to allow swimming pools to reopen at the earliest possible opportunity for people of all ages as part of the roadmap for leaving the national lockdown.

Following guidance produced by Swim England, extensive measures have been put in place by swimming pool operators to ensure people's safety and the low rates of transmission linked to leisure facilities are testament to their effectiveness. Swimming also provides a huge boost for peoples' physical and mental wellbeing.

With activity levels inevitably falling again during the current national lockdown, getting swimming pools back open as early as possible is more important than ever. Particularly for the 14 million people who swim each year in England. When schools return we will also need our pools to help reduce worrying existing health inequalities that currently mean that less than 50% of children from poorer families, and just 49.1% of Black children currently leave school able to swim.

The swimming community has appreciated the incredibly difficult situation facing the government and have supported measures to reduce the spread of infection in our communities, including the current national lockdown.

However, not making swimming pools one of the first venues to reopen for both informal and organised activities, which naturally lend themselves to social distancing, would be a mistake.

**Risk of Transmission:** Swimming pools are well managed, chlorinated, controlled environments where the risk of transmission can be successfully mitigated. This was previously acknowledged by the government who had allowed swimming pools to remain open in all tier areas prior to the creation of tier 4 and subsequent national lockdown.

**Chlorinated water:** All available evidence, as outlined by the expert Pool Water Treatment Advisory Group (PWTAG), is that "the physical effect of the pool water and an appropriate relationship between free chlorine and pH value should inactivate the virus within 15-30 seconds. "The dilution of virus in the pool water volume will also reduce the risk of exposure and transmission." This position is supported by the World Health Organisation.

**Equipment:** Whilst a recent study showed that the risk of coronavirus transmission from sharing sports equipment is likely to be low, Swim England guidance already has in place measures to reduce, and in many cases totally remove, any equipment sharing during a session.

**Ventilation:** Government guidance is for facility operators to ensure the rate of supply of outside air to occupants is a minimum of 20L per person per second as a precautionary measure.

A typical 25 metre 6 lane pool will have an air volume in excess of 4,000 m<sup>3</sup>. A pool hall should undertake a complete air change a minimum of four times per hour, that is an equivalent of 4,444L every second. With a maximum occupancy under Covid-19 of 1 person per 6 m<sup>2</sup> there would be a

maximum of 56 people in a 25 metre 6 lane pool. At 100% fresh air that is equivalent to over 80L per person per second.

Anecdotal evidence shows that warmer temperatures and high humidity also all play a part in mitigating the risk of airborne transmission. Additionally the increased ratio of air to participants in a swimming pool hall lowers the risk further.

Swim England has produced thorough guidance to support the safe return to the swimming pool for all users, including for organised sporting activities, ensuring social distancing can be maintained at all times.

Figures from UK Active measured from the end of July to the end of October, there have been a total of 781 COVID-19 cases from leisure facility users that have visited facilities over this 14-week period, against a backdrop of 735,398 UK-wide cases in the same time (as measured by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control).

Furthermore, the data collated for the UK across the whole period since reopening – measured from 25 July to 25 October – shows the sites have seen more than 55 million visits, with an overall rate of 1.41 cases per 100,000 visits.

The results show that while the case rate for the UK's general population had risen consistently, with a steep acceleration in growth from September onwards, the prevalence of the virus has remained extremely low in the UK fitness and leisure sector.

**Health and Wellbeing impact:** The Government has itself repeatedly stressed the importance of being active to help in the fight against Covid-19 yet millions of people, many of whom are unable to exercise on land because of a range of health conditions, are now unable to be active in the water to help improve both their physical and mental health.

The unique properties of the water mean it is an ideal environment for people of all ages to be active and swimming pools are essential community facilities to help improve the health and wellbeing of communities up and down the country. We believe they should be recognised as such when the government starts to reduce restrictions as the country moves out of the national lockdown.

Weekly swimming participation in England saves the NHS and our social care system more than £357 million a year.

Water-based activity places less stress on the joints and makes exercise more comfortable and practical than on dry land. This benefits people with musculoskeletal conditions such as osteoarthritis. Musculoskeletal conditions affected an estimated 18.8 million people across the UK in 2017 and accounted for more than 22 per cent of the total burden of ill health (morbidity) in the UK.

It is not just peoples physical health that is supported by swimming. Swim England research revealed that 1.4 million adults in Britain felt that swimming had significantly reduced their symptoms of anxiety or depression. 490,000 people have reduced or no longer take medication for their mental health as a result of swimming.

Additionally, members aged 18 and over in many swimming, diving, water polo and artistic swimming clubs across the country have been unable to return to the activities they love for an extended period of time.

Since the first lockdown, more than 1,000 clubs up and down the country have been operating in a Covid secure way, offering the opportunity for hundreds of thousands of people of all ages, including thousands aged 18 and over, to be active in the water and improve their health and wellbeing.

Being denied this opportunity following the end of the current national lockdown would be devastating for so many.

On behalf of the many people aged 18 and over who are part of our fantastic swimming and diving clubs I would implore you to reopen swimming pools at the earliest available opportunity and permit a return to organised indoor individual activities in all tiers when the national lockdown is eased.

Doing so would recognise the essential and unique role pools play in supporting the health and wellbeing of our communities in all parts of the country and allow them to play a full role in helping the nation recover from the impact of Covid-19.

Yours sincerely,



**Catherine West**  
**Member of Parliament for Hornsey & Wood Green**