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From: paul,tuohy@cyclinguk.org

(postal address below)

6th April 2020

The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP

Secretary of State for Health

Department of Health and Social Care

39 Victoria Street

London SW1H 0EU

Dear Secretary of State

**Maintaining the right to exercise during the COVID-19 outbreak**

Cycling UK is the UK’s national cycle charity which promotes cycling as a non-competitive activity, for both day-to-day travel and recreation. As a socially responsible charity, we have been leading the debate on the vital role of cycling in maintaining the public’s physical and mental health, and its ability to make essential journeys without depending on -public transport, taxis or ride-sharing, from the outset of the COVID-19 crisis.

We were pleased that the Prime Minister encouraged people to cycle, on their own or with members of their household only, as a way to take exercise once a day. We similarly commend the Government’s decision to allow cycle shops to remain open. This has enabled people to buy bicycles or to obtain parts to repair previously under-used bicycles, in order to take up cycling either as exercise or as a way of making essential journeys without relying on public transport, taxis or ride-sharing.

We are therefore concerned to learn that you are considering prohibiting outdoor exercise, because a few individuals have evidently not adhered to the Government’s widely-respected social-distancing rules.

We fully understand the concern that such behaviour could prolong this crisis, undermine the NHS’s capacity to deal with it, and cost lives. We urge you though to weigh up carefully that the health and other consequences of prohibiting exercise altogether could be still worse. The Chief Medical Officer, Sir Chris Whitty, has said that “taking exercise is always a good thing to do”. This is particularly true for people from deprived groups who may already be facing huge financial and emotional stresses in their lives, living with children in cramped conditions without outdoor space. Preventing them from exercising outdoors could have terrible consequences for their physical and mental health, and that of others they live with.

We are also concerned that, if outdoor exercise was banned, this would have knock-on effects on people’s ability to cycle when making journeys to work that cannot be done from home, to obtain food and other essential supplies, and to provide care for others. A person cycling to work (e,g. in the health service) might look like a person who was cycling for exercise, and may therefore face unjustified harassment, including from the police, who (like everyone else) would find it very difficult to know whether or not someone was cycling for a legitimate purpose. This threat would further undermine the vital role that cycling is playing in maintaining people’s health and mobility for essential journeys in these extraordinarily difficult times.

We recognise that, in this crisis, there are no easy decisions. However we strongly urge the Government not to prohibit outdoor exercise and, instead, to continue encouraging cycling (either solo or in household groups only), not only for physical activity but also as a way of making essential journeys. For our part, Cycling UK is happy to play our role in urging those who cycle (including the many people who have taken up cycling in this crisis) to act responsibly, and to support proportionate enforcement against those flouting the rules.

Yours sincerely

Paul Tuohy

Chief Executive