

18 May 2020

Sir

Following the publication of the Prime Minister's 50-page 'exit strategy' document from the coronavirus lockdown, he will no doubt be aware of the strong evidence linking the COVID-19 infection to obesity and greater mortalityⁱ. Given the scale of the pandemic and the existing public health crisis of obesity, now is the time for his government to act.

The food industry is feeding us heavily discounted and promoted processed food and drink, full of salt, fat and sugar, giving us little feeling of satiation, which greatly increases our calorie intake. Millions of families face poverty and food insecurity and are unable to access a nutritionally adequate diet, are more likely to develop obesity and related health conditions and tragically, when they contract COVID-19 and are hospitalised, are more likely to die.

There is increasing evidence of the potential mechanisms that link obesity to these effects.

- Fat cells, particularly in the lungs are more likely to be invaded by COVID-19.
- Defects in the immune response are already known to occur in people with obesity.
- Those with abdominal obesity are less able to expand their lungs, are more difficult to ventilate and are more likely to die.

Our current food system does not promote equality in health, so personal responsibility is not the solution. The government needs to take these evidence-based actions:

- Ensure the food industry only discounts, promotes and advertises healthy food and drink.
- Force the food industry to reformulate food and drink with less salt, sugar and calories.
- Ensure NHS Trusts provide keyworkers with the highest nutritional quality food.
- Give direct advice to a very concerned public about how to identify their risk, exercise and lose weight safely.

Now that Mr Johnson has direct experience of this vicious virus, we ask him to take immediate action to protect the most vulnerable people in our society and create a more resilient Great Britain, both now and in the future.

The responsibility is his.

Yours sincerely,



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ⁱ Frederick K Ho et al. Modifiable and non-modifiable risk factors for COVID-19: results from UK Biobank (May 2020): <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.28.20083295v1>