

The Government has responded to the petition you signed – [“Require British Sign Language Interpreters for emergency announcements on TV.”](#)

Government responded:

The Government has assessed that in accordance with PHE guidelines, we cannot safely include a BSL interpreter in the room for daily briefings without potentially putting them and others at risk.

The Government is committed to building a digitally inclusive society, and aims to ensure that COVID-19 media announcements are accessible for all UK audiences. As broadcasters are independent from the Government, they are responsible for their signing resources and for meeting statutory accessibility requirements set out by Ofcom.

Social distancing rules may make it harder for broadcasters to provide appropriate signing resources. However, the Government continues to engage with broadcasters on developing accessibility provisions that are in line with the Government’s social distancing guidelines.

In line with Public Health England (PHE) guidelines, it is not possible to safely include a physical British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter in the room for daily briefings as this would require additional operations staff such as an additional cameraman to be present. At Downing Street the Government is working within the constraints of a historical site with limited space.

Everyone in government continues to practice social distancing, which means staying two metres apart where possible, and journalists are currently attending the daily briefings remotely rather than in person in order to prevent unnecessary risk. Having an interpreter physically attend, along with any additional staff required to facilitate broadcast of the interpretation, contradicts the PHE guidelines, and potentially puts them and others at risk.

For these reasons the Government believes that it is right to limit the number of people present in the daily briefings to protect all those who must be present from additional risks.

However, it is vital that that public health information reaches everyone across the country, which is why BSL interpretation of the daily Covid briefings is now provided via the BBC News channel and iPlayer, which is available on all TV packages as part of Freeview. The Government continues to engage with broadcasters to ensure greater replication of this ‘remote’ signed interpretation across a wider range of media channels.

ITV’s bespoke Sign Language studio, SignPost, is also offering content for the deaf community online, with a daily online news bulletin produced remotely from presenters’ houses. This has a BSL interpreter covering all of the latest news regarding Covid. The Government will continue to

engage with broadcasters about including signing provisions in future announcements to ensure that information is accessible.

On wider programming signing requirements, Ofcom, as the independent broadcast regulator, enforces statutory targets for the amount of signing that eligible broadcasters, including BBC, ITV, Channel 4, and Channel 5, have to provide. It is up to the broadcasters to determine which programmes they select for signing. Ofcom encourages all broadcasters to go beyond their statutory requirements through best practice guidelines. These provide guidance for broadcasters on selecting programmes, advising that broadcasters should give priority to the most popular programmes and a broad range of programmes. It is Ofcom's role to monitor how broadcasters are meeting their signing targets, including taking into account the current circumstances.

Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

This is a revised response. The Petitions Committee requested a response which more directly addressed the request of the petition. You can find the original response towards the bottom of the petition page (<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/301461>)

Click this link to view the response online:

[https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/301461?reveal\\_response=yes](https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/301461?reveal_response=yes)

The Petitions Committee will take a look at this petition and its response. They can press the government for action and gather evidence. If this petition reaches 100,000 signatures, the Committee will consider it for a debate.

The Committee is made up of 11 MPs, from political parties in government and in opposition. It is entirely independent of the Government. Find out more about the

Committee: <https://petition.parliament.uk/help#petitions-committee>

Thanks,

The Petitions team

UK Government and Parliament