

Dear Supermarket CEO,

As we entered into a new round of national lockdowns, supermarkets have continued to play their part in keeping everyone safe. The recent increase in communications about facemasks and the potential that supermarkets will be taking a harder line on masks being mandatory is a move which I'm sure has been taken with the nation's health at the forefront.

Nonetheless it's been a move that we know some autistic people are deeply concerned about, so it has been reassuring to see clear recognition of the fact that some people are 'exempt' from wearing masks in most communications and media coverage. These exemptions are vital for many thousands of people, including some autistic people, to ensure they can shop for essential food and provisions safely.

As you will know the Government's facemask exemptions include some autistic children and adults who cannot wear a face covering safely, whether because they have extreme sensitivities that makes it feel like they're being smothered or they don't understand the rule and would be constantly trying to remove their mask.

The purpose of this letter is to ask that you continue to consider the needs of disabled customers, and those with hidden conditions including autistic people in both your plans and your communications regarding facemasks. It is vital your staff understand these exemptions and hidden disabilities like autism too. This is particularly important if enforcement becomes stronger.

The Government's guidance states that people do not have to show evidence of their exemption status. For many autistic people, the threat of being challenged or even abused for not wearing a facemask could be so anxiety provoking that it might prevent them from even attempting to visit the supermarket in the first place. Being autistic does not place a person on the 'clinically extremely vulnerable' list, which would enable them to get priority delivery slots, so this situation could genuinely risk leaving some vulnerable autistic people unable to get essential food and provisions.

As the UK's leading charity for autistic people and their families, and on behalf of those autistic people across the UK, we hope you are able to offer some assurance that autistic people who are unable to wear masks will be



National Autistic Society
393 City Road
London
EC1V 1NG
United Kingdom

Tel: 020 7833 2299

Email: nas@nas.org.uk

considered in your plans. We know that this could make a real and positive difference during this difficult and challenging time.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C Stephens'.

Caroline Stephens
Chief Executive Officer