

The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP
Conservative Party Chair
Conservative Campaign Headquarters
4 Matthew Parker Street
London
SW1H 9HQ

Wednesday 11 January 2023

Dear Mr Zahawi,

I write to you following Andrew Bridgen's suspension as a Conservative MP to highlight the full extent of the Covid vaccine misinformation that Mr Bridgen has spread from both inside and outside of Parliament.

Mr Bridgen's comments, today and in previous weeks, are dangerous and put lives at risk. We are deeply concerned that he has been able to spread harmful misinformation in Parliament until today without consequence.

I therefore ask you whether the Conservative Party intends to endorse an MP who behaves like this at the next election.

As detailed in the appendix below, Full Fact has fact checked several false and misleading claims made by Mr Bridgen in recent months. Along with some of his constituents, we have called on Mr Bridgen to correct the record but he has not done this.

We have all seen what happens across the world when people in power help conspiracy theorists and amplify dangerous health misinformation. It costs lives.

As you know, Full Fact scrutinises the work of government and public health authorities and, when necessary, highlights mistakes and seeks corrections. Responding to a pandemic requires tough and imperfect choices that must be considered, confronted and reflected on honestly. It is vital that backbench MPs have the ability to scrutinise and raise questions, particularly on issues of public importance such as the Covid-19 vaccine rollout.

However, Mr Bridgen has chosen to amplify unfounded and life threatening conspiracy theories in a way that no UK politician has previously done. We look to you for leadership in challenging this.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Will Moy", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Will Moy.
Chief Executive, Full Fact.

Appendix

- We fact checked¹ several claims made by Andrew Bridgen MP, and others, during a debate in Parliament on 24 October on an e-petition asking the government to conduct an investigation into whether Covid-19 vaccines are responsible for an alleged “increase in heart attacks and related health issues”.

During this debate one of the claims made by Mr Bridgen was that “A study published in *The Journal of the American Medical Association*, included 7,806 children aged five or younger who were followed for an average of 91.4 days after their first Pfizer vaccination. The study showed that one in 500 children under five years of age who received a Pfizer mRNA—messenger ribonucleic acid—covid vaccine were hospitalised with a vaccine injury, and one in 200 had symptoms ongoing for weeks or months afterwards.”²

We wrote to him to explain that it is misleading to call these ‘vaccine injuries’ because the study in question³ was looking at events that occurred after vaccination, but were not necessarily related to or caused by the vaccine. We asked him to correct the record but we did not receive a response.

During the same debate Mr Bridgen also claimed “contradictory evidence was issued on two separate days. One piece of advice said that pregnant and

¹ <https://fullfact.org/health/vaccine-safety-westminster-debate/>

² <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-10-24/debates/FF880636-BC3B-4BDB-A5E0-D6D4B82B2888/Covid-19VaccinesSafety#contribution-76C612FC-E196-4082-8B1B-1E5ACC5D54BF>

³ <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamanetworkopen/fullarticle/2797451>

breastfeeding women could have the vaccine, and then another Government body said that that was not safe and that it did not recommend it.”⁴

It is not clear what Mr Bridgen was referring to but it may be the fact that there was some confusion when an old government document from December 2020 was widely circulated online. This document reflected the information known when it was originally published, saying “sufficient reassurance of safe use of the vaccine in pregnant women cannot be provided at the present time”, However, the web page appeared as though it had been updated in August 2022, causing some people to suggest the government had now changed its advice for pregnant women. That document had not been recently updated. It was in a group of documents, one of which was updated on 16 August and had nothing to do with vaccines in pregnancy.

- We fact checked⁵ a false claim about mRNA vaccines made by Mr Bridgen during Prime Minister's Questions on 7 December. Mr Bridgen said that mRNA vaccines “are not recommended for pregnant women or those who are breastfeeding.”⁶

We wrote to Mr Bridgen to inform him that what he said was not true and to ask him to correct this claim but he did not do this. Full Fact supporters in his constituency of North West Leicestershire also wrote to Mr Bridgen to ask him to correct the record in relation to this claim.

- We fact checked⁷ claims Mr Bridgen made about the safety and efficacy of Covid-19 vaccines during a ‘Vaccines: Potential Harms’ adjournment debate⁸ that Mr Bridgen raised in the House of Commons on 13 December.

During the debate Mr Bridgen claimed: *“It is instructive to note that, according to pharmaco-vigilance analysis, the serious adverse effects reported by the public*

⁴<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-10-24/debates/FF880636-BC3B-4BDB-A5E0-D6D4B82B2888/Covid-19VaccinesSafety#contribution-F9561E39-1ED8-4430-B68F-C5A7566B8566>

⁵ <https://fullfact.org/health/Andrew-Bridgen-Covid-19-vaccines/>

⁶<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-12-07/debates/8253154F-B5B4-4507-8EDD-ACB8A3267B4C/Engagements#contribution-C8692BC7-1846-452D-93ED-6004097E8B77>

⁷ <https://fullfact.org/health/andrew-bridgen-vaccine-safety-debate/>

⁸<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-12-13/debates/EAB2E8A2-A721-47DD-A79C-4EFD10F10C2D/VaccinesPotentialHarms>

are thought to represent only 10% of the true rate of serious adverse events occurring within the population.”⁹

Mr Bridgen’s office informed us that this was based on an article about pharmacovigilance published in an academic journal in 1995¹⁰, which with regard to the UK’s Yellow Card scheme said: “Estimates of the completeness of reporting suggest that it is rare for more than 10% of serious reactions to be reported”. The paper goes on to say that “reporting is rarely better than 2-4% for non-serious reactions”.

These figures have been shared more recently by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency but the MHRA has also specifically warned against using these estimates in the context of Covid-19 vaccines.

In response to declining rates of Yellow Card reporting in 2018, the MHRA said: “It is estimated that only 10% of serious reactions and between 2 and 4% of non-serious reactions are reported.”¹¹

However, a notice now appears alongside this article which states: “These estimates should not be used as indicators of the reporting rate for Covid-19 vaccines, for which there is high public awareness of the Yellow Card scheme and the reporting of suspected reactions.”

We wrote to Mr Bridgen to ask him to correct the record in relation to this claim but he did not do this.

- We have previously fact checked¹² false claims that Mr Bridgen has been repeating on social media this week, such as the idea that vaccines are ‘gene therapy’.¹³

⁹<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-12-13/debates/EAB2E8A2-A721-47DD-A79C-4EFD10F10C2D/VaccinesPotentialHarms#contribution-DADE4E71-1297-46C4-A8A1-3C0E4BC47A07>

¹⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5401160/?page=1>

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/yellow-card-please-help-to-reverse-the-decline-in-reporting-of-suspected-adverse-drug-reactions#:~:text=It%20is%20estimated%20that%20only%2010%25>

¹² <https://fullfact.org/health/bayer-covid-vaccine-gene-therapy/>

¹³ <https://twitter.com/ABridgen/status/1612074614766637057>