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Matt Hancock quits as health secretary after breaking social distance guidance

By Emma Harrison
BBC News Online

🕒 1 hour ago

Coronavirus pandemic



Matt Hancock resigned as health secretary following pictures being published of him in an embrace

Matt Hancock has resigned as health secretary after he breached social distancing guidance by kissing a colleague.

In a letter to the PM he said the government "owe it to people who have sacrificed so much in this pandemic to be honest when we have let them down".

Boris Johnson said he was "sorry" to receive the resignation.

Former chancellor Sajid Javid has said he is "honoured" to have been chosen as Mr Hancock's replacement.

Mr Hancock had been under increasing pressure to quit, **after the Sun published pictures** and then a video of Mr Hancock and Gina Coladangelo, who are both married with three children, kissing. The newspaper said they had been taken inside the Department of Health on 6 May.

Mr Hancock has ended his 15-year marriage to his wife, Martha, and the relationship with Ms Coladangelo is understood to be a serious one.

Fellow Tory MPs, as well as Labour and the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group, had called for the health secretary to be sacked and a senior Tory figure told the BBC that many MPs had told their whips on Saturday that he ought to resign.

BBC political editor Laura Kuenssberg said No10 had stressed that it had been Mr Hancock's decision to go and that he had not been pushed out by the prime minister.

She said Ms Coladangelo was also leaving her role as a non-executive director of the Department of Health.

- **How did Matt Hancock break Covid restrictions?**
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In a video posted on Twitter, Mr Hancock said: "I have been to see the prime minister to resign as secretary of state for health and social care.

"I understand the enormous sacrifices that everybody in this country has made, that you have made, and those of us who make these rules have got to stick by them and that's why I have got to resign."

@MattHancock

6:16 PM · Jun 26, 2021



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In his resignation letter, Mr Hancock, who served as health secretary for three years, reiterated his apology for "breaking the guidance" and he apologised to his family and loved ones for "putting them through this".



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

020 7210 4850

26 June 2021

Dear Prime Minister

I am writing to resign as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. We have worked so hard as a country to fight the pandemic. The last thing I would want is for my private life to distract attention from the single-minded focus that is leading us out of this crisis. I want to reiterate my apology for breaking the guidance, and apologise to my family and loved ones for putting them through this. I also need to be with my children at this time.

We owe it to people who have sacrificed so much in this pandemic to be honest when we have let them down as I have done by breaching the guidance.

The NHS is the best gift a nation has ever given itself, and the dedication and courage of the NHS staff and the ceaseless work of the officials in the Department is something we should all be proud of. We didn't get every decision right but I know people understand how hard it is to deal with the unknown, making the difficult trade-offs between freedom, prosperity and health that we have faced. I am so proud that Britain avoided the catastrophe of an overwhelmed NHS and that through foresight and brilliant science we have led the world in the vaccination effort, so we stand on the brink of a return to normality.

The reforms we have started in the health system will ensure it continues to provide even better care for people in years to come. We are building a better NHS which makes

smarter use of technology and data, forming a new UK Health Security Agency, delivering positive changes to mental health care and will fix the problems in social care once and for all.

Many times I stood at the podium in Downing Street and thanked the team - my own team, the NHS, the volunteers, the Armed Services, our pharmacists GPs, the pharmaceutical industry and the whole British public who have made such sacrifices to help others. Those thanks are heartfelt and sincere and so I must resign.

It has been the honour of my life to serve in your Cabinet as Secretary of State and I am incredibly proud of what we have achieved. I will of course continue to support you in whatever way I can from the back benches, and I would like to thank you for your unwavering support, your leadership and your optimism, particularly as we worked together to overcome this awful disease.

*Yours ever
Matt*

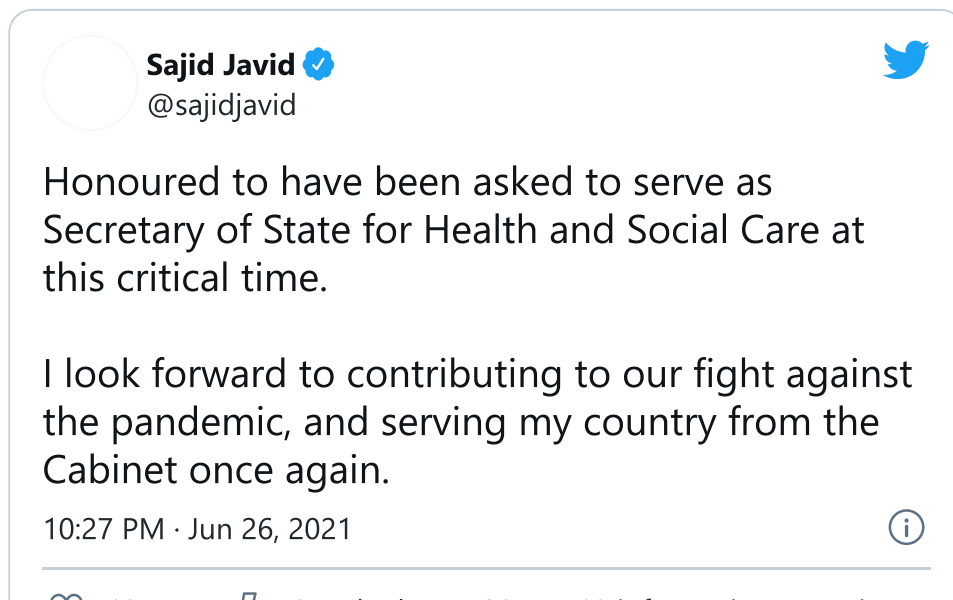
MATT HANCOCK

In response, the prime minister said Mr Hancock "should leave office very proud of what you have achieved - not just in tackling the pandemic, but even before Covid-19 struck us".

He added: "I am grateful for your support and believe that your contribution to public service is far from over."

- **Hancock's resignation letter in full and the PM's response**

Mr Javid, who has held several key roles in government, said he was "honoured" to be appointed as health secretary "at this critical time".



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His return to cabinet comes 16 months after he resigned as chancellor when he rejected the prime minister's order to fire his team of aides

he rejected the prime minister's order to fire his team of aides.

Before that Mr Javid was home secretary. He has also led the housing, communities, business and culture departments.

One of his first jobs as health secretary will be to examine the data ahead of England's proposed end to Covid restrictions on 19 July.

Former health secretary Jeremy Hunt described Mr Javid's appointment to the role as an "excellent choice", saying it was the best possible news for social care because his time at the Department for Communities and Local Government meant he "gets it".

However, Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer said Mr Johnson should have sacked Mr Hancock rather than wait for him to resign.

The SNP's Westminster leader Ian Blackford tweeted: "Massive failure of leadership by Boris Johnson, Hancock should have been sacked."

Liberal Democrats leader Sir Ed Davey tweeted that Mr Hancock's legacy was one of "failure" and he said the fact that Mr Johnson "could just carry on regardless brings the prime minister's judgement into question once again".



Analysis
By Laura Kuenssberg
Political editor

One out and one in. The prime minister had backed Matt Hancock to hang on.

The now former health secretary had tried to cling on. But even on Friday senior Tories were directly warning both of them that his position was just not tenable.

Not because of his personal exploits with a taxpayer-supported colleague, but because he broke the rules that he helped to set.

One senior Tory told me it "beggared belief" that the man who had essentially banned casual relationships for a year was caught out having disobeyed the guidance himself, but still tried to maintain his position. Another insider said "everyone hates hypocrisy".

For every moment that he tried to stay both his and Boris Johnson's judgement remained in doubt.

Read more from Laura here.

Tory MP Andrew Bridgen told BBC News it had become clear that a "sizeable minority or even a majority of the public no longer had confidence in Matt Hancock".

Mr Bridgen added it "was not the affair but the hypocrisy of being someone who makes the rules and then broke the rules".

Rivka Gottlieb, from the Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group, told BBC News it was "absolutely right" that Mr Hancock resigned but said she thought he should have been sacked months ago over his "appalling record".

Concerns had also been raised about the process which saw Ms Coladangelo, a friend of Mr Hancock's from their days at Oxford University, appointed to the role - last September.

A No 10 spokesman has insisted the "correct procedure" had been followed but refused to go into detail.

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