

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

CONCERNS ABOUT GOVERNMENT'S COVID-19 RECOVERY STRATEGY AS CONFUSION REIGNS IN WEEK 8

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ
11TH MAY 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

Following his statement to the nation on Sunday night, the Prime Minister today provided further information today about the government's much heralded 'indicative' and 'conditional' pathway to an end of Covid-19 Lockdown in the UK: 'Our Plan to Rebuild: the UK Government's Covid-19 recovery strategy', which you can read here: <https://tinyurl.com/yc3gkjqw>. It's not straight forward, nor is it going to be easy; and as before the government says it will be guided by the 'scientific advice' every step of the way.

This includes advice on the reproduction rate of Covid-19 (known as the 'R': how many others, on average, an infected person will pass the virus onto), which according the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) is currently somewhere between 0.5 and 0.9 - meaning that someone with Covid-19 will infect less than 1 person (in contrast to the beginning of the epidemic, when the 'R' rate was between 2.7 and 3.0).

What is clear is that while some measures will be eased from this Wednesday – we are still in lockdown in week eight. So it's important that everyone in Newham keeps up with the restrictions in place, because we can't risk a second wave in our borough which could be disastrous for all Newham residents.

The Government's strategy for this second phase is about what it calls '*smarter controls*'; where people will need to continue with measures to minimise the spread of Covid-19 which will be in place for 'some time'.

Taking us through to July, the strategy sets out that this 'second phase' will start from this Wednesday, as more workers in certain sectors such as construction and manufacturing are being 'actively encouraged' to go back to work. Childcare providers will also be able to reopen, as long as health guidelines such as avoiding crowds and hand washing can take place.

When pressed in the House of Commons today, the Prime Minister was forced to concede the guidelines for employers on how to achieve Covid-19 safe working environments hasn't been published yet. It's crucial that those workers are given firm assurances from their employers that their work places are safe. If the guidelines are not available by Wednesday, those workers will be placed at greater risk. As it is, the Office for National Statistics published data today that showed that people in low-paid and manual jobs face a much greater risk from Covid-19, with men in low-skilled jobs four times more likely to die from the virus than men in professional occupations. Women working as carers are also twice as likely to die as those in professional and technical roles.

A mass return to road travel also has huge implications for air quality Newham. If the roads become clogged, the significant improvements we've seen to air quality in the borough will be lost - putting those with respiratory problems linked to Covid-19 at greater risk – and it will reverse the gains we are making to deal with the climate emergency that is destroying our planet as well.

An increase in traffic will also make it harder and more hazardous for key workers and vital services to use the roads, so nurses, doctors, carers, shop-workers, and delivery drivers will find it more difficult to get to work to keep us safe and keep supermarket shelves stocked.

We must also think carefully about how we can safely get to our places of work. The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, has been very clear that in the capital there is no possibility of public transport being able to cope with a mass return to work. Services remain limited, and social distancing will be virtually impossible if the numbers using trains, tube and buses rises from current rates.

There are still restrictions on large gatherings, though from Wednesday you can exercise as much as you want too, play some 'non-contact' sports with members of your household, sunbathe, have picnics and travel to other places in your car. You can also visit one other person who you don't live with - as long as you meet them outside and remain 2 meters apart.

Fines are also going to increase for those breaking the rules – but I really don't know how the over-stretched police force in this country are going to enforce these, given the experience we've had in Newham these past seven weeks. The government also 'suggests' that we wear face coverings in crowded places, but cautions us to use scarves or DIY-type masks instead of surgical ones needed by our frontline NHS and care workers.

Possibly from June (based on whether SAGE says its's ok to do so), some schools and businesses will be allowed to be open (I've already signed up to a petition by the National Education Union urging caution by the government on this); as will some sporting and cultural events – though those will happen behind closed doors. And then possibly, from July some remaining businesses will be allowed to be opened including hairdressers, cinemas and pubs.

The government's strategy is being examined by the Council in detail as we finalise plans for this new phase in Newham. This will be published as soon as we are able, because like all councils in the country, we're waiting for further guidance from the government across the range of measures it has set out, including on community testing, contact tracing and how to monitor and respond to localised 'hotspots'. The strategy will also inform our local 'recovery' plans for the borough which will be shaped by our commitment to responding to poverty and inequality in the borough as well as addressing the climate emergency.

As with our approach in the past seven weeks since lockdown, our next phase plans will be shared with residents across our Community Neighbourhoods and our voluntary sector partners, faith communities and local businesses, as well as all the community groups involved in our #HelpNewham local hub to support the most vulnerable in Newham. More details soon.

This against a backdrop where people in the UK are continuing to die and contract the virus. New infections in London are up to 25,891 of which 983 are recorded in Newham, and today

figures show there have been 210 more fatalities in the UK in the last 24 hours – and as these are figures gathered over a Bank Holiday weekend, when we know reporting is suppressed. Put that death toll of 210 in context – it's a disaster costing almost as many lives as the appalling combined tragedies of Grenfell, Hillsborough and the 7/7 bombings (total lives lost 224) – but a tragedy happening every day.

So far, 32,065 people have lost their lives, including Newham residents, often while pursuing jobs on the front line. We have lost inspirational teachers, doctors, nurses as well as heroes in the transport industry, the care sectors and other key fields. We must not allow this virus to regain a grip.

So I am urging you to think carefully before you change your behaviour. If you can stay at home, you should. You must avoid public transport. You must continue to practise social distancing at all times and follow the hygiene advice such as washing your hands regularly and disinfecting surfaces that you use.

We are living in extraordinary times, and the challenges and advice may begin to change over the next few weeks. But, to be clear, the safest place for you is home. The best advice is do what you have been doing over these past 7 weeks to protect yourself and others. The clearest message is, do not risk a second wave of virus in Newham and another upsurge of illness and death.

Stay safe.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rokhsana Fiaz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rokhsana Fiaz
Mayor of Newham

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of Everything We Do**