

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

KEEP UP WITH STAY AT HOME, 983 NEWHAM RESIDENTS INFECTED AND LOCAL MEASURES TO HELP SOCIAL DISTANCING, WALKING & CYCLING START TODAY

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ
15TH MAY 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

This weekend, please keep up with the restrictions in place, despite some changes announced this week by the government. We can't risk a second wave of Covid-19 infections or deaths in Newham.

Already in the last 24-hous, a further 384 people have lost their lives to Covid-19, bringing the UK total in all settings to 33,998 (as I wrote yesterday, this Public Health England figure differs from the weekly ONS figure of 40,496 that I reported earlier this week, and the reason for the difference can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/yd67vk97>). In London, there have been 26,193 confirmed cases of Covid-19 infections and 983 of those are Newham residents.

Worryingly, news has emerged this morning that 55 percent of pregnant women admitted to hospital with Covid-19 between the 1st March and 14th April, were ethnic minorities. The research from Oxford University also shows that of the 427 pregnant women monitored in the study, the majority hospitalised with Covid-19 were in the late second or third trimester, emphasising the importance of continued social distancing measures in later pregnancy. While most had good outcomes and transmission of Covid-19 to infants was uncommon, sadly 12 babies were tested positive for the virus (and 6 of those within in the first 12 hours after birth).

Already, the Royal College of Midwives (RCM) have rapidly developed new guidance for midwives and maternity support workers to ensure that they are aware of the increased risks for pregnant women from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) backgrounds. Further investigation is urgently required in this worrying area and included in the current inquiries looking at the disproportionate numbers of BAME people being affected by Covid-19 that is currently underway. You can read the research report here: <https://tinyurl.com/yaqya4q3>.

This time last year, we were celebrating the fact that Newham Council had declared a climate and health emergency, and began to initiate a series of actions to meet that commitment to become carbon neutral by 2030 and achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

We have already initiated a 'green' audit of all Council services, provided air quality monitoring devices for all schools, and soon will be publishing our first annual 'Newham Climate Now' report showing what progress we have made in the past 12 months. We are also finalising our Climate Emergency Action Plan which will be published soon; alongside the recommendations of the Climate Change Citizen Assembly held earlier this year, including our response.

Last year we prioritised tackling air quality in the borough, through our Air Quality Action Plan, because we have the largest number of deaths attributable to poor air quality and one of the highest levels for hospital admissions due to asthma-related conditions for under-9s in London. Poor air quality stunts the growth of children's lungs and worsens chronic illness, such as asthma, lung and heart disease, which are already high in Newham due to health inequality.

There is also emerging evidence linking air pollution with an increased vulnerability to the most severe impacts of COVID-19. The University of Cambridge, found that some markers of poor air quality, nitrogen oxides and ozone, were associated with COVID-19 mortality in different English regions, after adjusting for population density. You can read the full report here: <https://tinyurl.com/yakh4ztu>.

That's why, as we carry on publishing more details about how the Council is responding to Covid-19, we'll continue with our commitment to tackling air pollution in the borough; including actions to address climate emergency which is a core part now and in plans for our future recovery.

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, all but essential travel has been restricted even in this new phase of 'loosened' lockdown. Walking and cycling are growing as important and safe alternative forms of travel; so that public transport can be left for essential workers to use. We also need to prepare for at least two more waves of Covid-19 in the coming months, and it will be with us for a long time, so increased walking and cycling will be critical to enable more people to travel safely and efficiently in our borough. The advice from both government and the Mayor of London remains to avoid public transport, and to walk or cycle where possible. But, if that does not feel like an option should we all jump in our cars? For London, and in particular in a borough like Newham, where the majority do not own a car, it's not a solution.

That's why we've been working on plans over recent weeks to invest more to encourage walking and cycling. From this weekend, we're going to start putting in place more walking and cycling measures, while streets are quiet and traffic is reduced to build on the progress we've made since lockdown started 8 weeks ago; and ensure that when we come out of this Covid-19 pandemic, we don't return to the 'old' normal.

Why? Well because in Newham, there's been a *40 per cent reduction in road traffic due to Covid-19 lockdown, and a corresponding 50 per cent reduction in noxious NO2 pollution* in our busiest roads – which is an incredible leap forward which we must keep up. While walking and cycling may feel like an alien concept to some, evidence shows nearly half of car trips made by Londoners before the coronavirus lockdown can be made by bike in around 10 minutes. So switching away from the car is surely not too big a price to pay to clean up our air, protect life and support the health of all our residents.

Here in Newham we are joining the Mayor of London and Transport for London (TfL) to introduce the *Streetspace* scheme which is designed to make it easier and safer to use sustainable transport methods like walking and cycling, during Covid-19. TfL are currently prioritising central London, and as we progress discussions with them we'll be able to announce *Streetspace* measures in the borough soon.

TfL's *Streetspace* is a response to the recent easing of lockdown measures by preparing safe travel options for workers who have no choice to return to (essential) work in central London. As access to public transport will be limited, to help reduce crowding on the tube, trains and busy bus routes, TfL are introducing temporary changes to avoid crowded pavements and cycle lanes that will make it difficult for people to social distance. You can read more about TfL's *Streetspace* scheme here: <https://tinyurl.com/ybm4hhdc>.

One of the main aims of *Streetspace* is to support local journeys to be done safely by walking and cycling instead and that's why we've been working with TfL to identify places where temporary changes are needed to support social distancing. But we've already started work to make it possible for residents to maintain social distancing in our local high streets and busiest routes through installing signs on lampposts and painting stencils on footways to encourage people to remain 2 meters apart.

From today, work will start to widen pavements on high streets to give space for queues outside shops as people safely walk past while socially distancing, as well as introduce extra temporary cycle lanes across the borough.

This weekend, we're focusing on High Street North in East Ham and Green Street in Upton Park. Work will be undertaken to:

- increase the amount of pavement space by removing parking bays and limiting times across loading bays to make additional space for walking or queuing
- Declutter pavements by removing benches and bins so that there is more space for shoppers and pedestrians
- Install more social distancing signs
- Stencilling information on pavements

From next week, more changes will be introduced, and options explored, in other high 'footfall' areas of the borough to help residents shop, walk and cycle safely. These include:

- De-cluttering our pavements to temporarily remove street furniture and other 'obstructions' in order to create more footway space, with high 'footfall' areas being prioritised first.
- Reviewing 'insets' for car parking, and other parking bays, in high 'footfall' areas to see which ones can be removed to widen footpath areas for safe walking or cycling.
- Examining which roads can be narrowed or converted to one-way only by using barriers to create more social distancing space.
- Implementing one-way markings and signage on residential footpaths to promote social distancing across our borough neighbourhoods.
- Implementing more 'low traffic neighbourhood' schemes to encourage walking and cycling.

If the environmental arguments do not persuade you that we need to respond to what Sadiq Khan has called '*the biggest challenge to London's public transport network in Transport for London's history*', perhaps economics will because travel by car and public transport are about to get a lot more expensive in London.

In the last few years, London has been the only major city in Western Europe that hasn't received direct government funding to run day-to-day transport services since being cut by the last government. That's why it relies heavily on passenger fares to pay for services; and already because of Covid-19, TfL has had to use its £2.1 billion reserves money to replace lost fare income which has fallen by 90 per cent because of the government's requirement to reduce Londoners travelling on public transport unless it was essential during the first phase of lockdown.

So, in order to secure emergency funding from the government to keep TfL from going bust because of Covid-19, the Mayor of London has reluctantly had to accept a range of new measures in exchange which were the only options the government put on the table, so the Mayor of London had no choice. These include ditching the price-freeze on tubes, buses and trains, with the congestion charge going up to £15 per day (it's now £11.50) from the 22nd June. It will also be extending from 7am to 10pm, seven days a week as at the moment it only applies to weekdays.

Free travel for London's 1.5 million young people will be suspended indefinitely, which means that school children will have to pay if they use a bus or train to get to school. And those with Freedom Passes plus over-60s will only be able to access free travel outside of peak times. The £12.50-a-day ultra-low emission zone (ULEZ), which was suspended alongside the congestion-charge during the first phase of lockdown, will also be reintroduced on a 24/7 basis for older, more polluting petrol or diesel vehicles. While these emergency measures will be kept under review, TfL will continue to

support NHS staff and care home employees by temporarily extending its Congestion Charge reimbursement scheme.

So, whether for the environment, for our own pockets, or for the health of our family, friends and neighbours, we are going to have to accept the way we travel around our borough in future will have to change.

Next week marks the start of the third month since lockdown began, and an awful price has been paid with thousands of people dying because of Covid-19. I know that some residents are finding it frustrating, and want life to return back to normal so that they can go out, hang out with friends and socialise like before. So here's a video experiment from Japan's public broadcaster, NHK, worth watching showing how viruses and germs can rapidly spread: <https://tinyurl.com/y959ybn6>, and why it's vital that we all keep up with the restrictions in place.

Covid-19 will be causing ongoing disruption to our lives for a long time ahead, and we are going to need to change our habits and behaviour as a consequence. It will also bring less pollution, healthier streets, better ways of traveling that are safe for us as well. So for now, please stay home and avoid unnecessary travel, socially distance at all times and keep up with the hygiene requirements like washing your hands. Please think twice if you are considering driving in Newham, or visiting places outside of the borough.

Above all, I hope you and your loved ones stay safe this weekend.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rokhsana Fiaz". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Rokhsana Fiaz
Mayor of Newham

**People at the Heart
of Everything We Do**