

**UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):**

**WE ARE NEWHAM: WE'LL GET THROUGH COVID-19  
WITH HELP FROM ALL OF YOU AND OUR FRIENDS**

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ  
18<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

There have been quite a few new developments today, some more positive than others. First more sad news: daily figures published by Public Health England (PHE), show that the total number of deaths across all settings has risen to 34,796, which is a further 160 fatalities in the last 24 hours. In terms of the level of infection, London has recorded 26,487 cases of the virus, of which 994 are residents from Newham.

Tomorrow, we'll find out the latest weekly figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) which will reveal the most accurate number of deaths in the UK so far as it covers all Covid-19 deaths formally registered in the week ending 11 days before publication – including the total count of Covid-19 confirmed deaths in care homes in England. By contrast, the daily PHE figure reflects all deaths where a positive test for COVID-19 has been confirmed, but it misses people who never had a test and reflects deaths during that long period when testing was largely limited to hospitals in the UK (so missing most deaths in the community during those weeks).

No doubt the ONS figures will be higher, as it will include all those that have died in care home. This evening, there have been media revelations that an 'as yet unpublished' PHE study shows that temporary care workers transmitted Covid-19 between care homes, unwittingly spreading the virus in the early months of the pandemic in the UK. In the Capital, doctors have also reported possible fresh outbreaks of the virus in care and nursing homes in West London.

Today, England's Chief Medical Officer (and his counterparts in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) has added 'loss of sense of smell or taste' to the guidance on the symptoms of Covid-19. This means that if you, or a member of your household, experience this symptom (or a new / persistent cough or a fever) then from today you should also self-isolate. If you are in any doubt please ring the NHS 111 service to check.

There was also news for the parents of small children, as Health Secretary Matt Hancock MP, announced that testing will now be available to anyone over the age of five, showing symptoms, to get a test for the virus. As we move towards an uncertain return to school for our young people, potentially as early as June 1<sup>st</sup>, the importance of being able to test children will become more important, although as children often only display very minor, or no symptoms, it's unclear how far this will help prevent the spread of the disease.

As the government asks teachers and parents to get children ready to return to school judgements about safety are increasingly questionable. Small wonder then that teachers feel they are being treated as guinea pigs; as do parents concerned about their children. I really understand those concerns. That's why the Council is working with all schools in the borough to support each one to come to a conclusion about when it will be safe, fair and responsible

to return. The views of parents will be critically important to each and every decision that is made, and they won't be rushed, nor will any decision be taken lightly.

Today, I was also concerned to read the national rollout of a phone app for the government's test and track response to coronavirus may be delayed until June, and tonight Matt Hancock MP told the government press conference he could only say the app would be ready 'in the coming weeks'. Ultimately, our ability to control the rate of infection and achieve further relaxation of the lockdown will rely on the effectiveness of the government's test, track and trace system.

Comments from the Prime Minister's spokesman added to the confusion when he told journalists that the test track and trace project could work without the app which is being trialled in the Isle of Wight. He also appeared to suggest the lockdown could be relaxed still further without the system operating at all.

The NHS-designed app, along the recruitment of a team of 21,000 contact tracers, were seen as key to plans to ease restrictions by alerting authorities to any localised outbreaks of Covid-19 and allowing them to be tackled. Today's comments appear to challenge that view, but fails to say how any easing of the lock-down will now be justified.

For now, the advice I would give to you is the same I've been giving last week and the weeks before: the virus is still with us. If you can stay at home, you should. Avoid public transport if possible, the system simply won't be able to accommodate the numbers it did before Covid-19 hit, because even if the public transport is at full capacity social distance will mean that only 1 in 10 people will be able to use it.

Besides, walking or cycling is a better option than cars, because bad air quality increases the vulnerability of those with respiratory conditions and makes them more prone to Covid-19 infection. Over the weekend, the Council has started to widen pavements on high streets to give residents extra space to queue outside shops and be able to walk or cycle past at a safe distance, and we are consulting with our disabled residents to make sure that the changes don't impact their ability to get around.

Your health and safety remains our priority. We've pulled out the stops to protect the most vulnerable and minimise the spread of Covid-19 in our borough. We have worked with resident-led mutual aid groups, faith communities and the voluntary sector to feed the most vulnerable – and the Council is indebted to the thousands of residents who are working to help Newham during this public health emergency. We've also collected bins and swept the streets; and stopped retailers trading illegally, supported children with special educational needs and offered youth services through zoom.

The impact of Covid-19 on our children and young people in the borough is an area we are tackling through working with our youth workers, schools and parent groups. This evening I joined a group of young people accessing our youth services digitally during lockdown. They spoke about their hopes and their fears, missing their friends and being able to go out freely (plus how boring being stuck at home with parents is getting and too much school work still!).

That's why it was also a joy to watch this video sent to me today from one of our secondary schools in Newham. I hope you also enjoy this little bit of magic as you wind down for the day '*Lister Music Presents: A Little Help From My Lister Friends*':  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePe\\_AiiKxWk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePe_AiiKxWk)

My prayers for your safety, and that of your loved ones.

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

**Rokhsana Fiaz**  
**Mayor of Newham**

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