

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

**MORE LOCKDOWN EASING, SCHOOLS SHOULDN'T OPEN ON THE 1st JUNE
AND NATIONAL TRACK & TESTING STARTS TOMORROW**

FROM MAYOR FIAZ

27th MAY 2020

Dear Newham Resident,

It's been another couple of tumultuous days for the government, as the controversy surrounding the Prime Minister's chief advisor continues unabated. This follows Dominic Cummings explanation over the Bank Holiday weekend that he travelled to Durham during lockdown with his family for childcare reasons. Outrage continues, over the confusion it brings and the risks it presents because people may be thinking 'why bother' sticking to the restrictions in place if there is a 'two-tier' system for adhering to lockdown.

People are justifiably angry because of the personal sacrifices that most of us have made in slowing the spread of the virus, helping the NHS and saving lives – and staying away from their friends and loved ones. They are also angry, because the chief advisor can't even bring himself to say 'sorry'.

In Newham, we cannot risk another wave of Covid-19, because of all the vulnerabilities in our community: from deprivation, health inequality, occupations and multi-generational households. So I urge you all, to please stick with the on-going social distance guidance and restrictions in place: stay at home for the sake of all of us here in Newham.

Don't travel unless it's absolute vital, work from home if you can and keep up with the personal hygiene like washing your hands regularly. We are in this for the long haul and our way of living is going to change for a long time to come, so all of us have to demonstrate personal responsibility for the benefit of the wider community.

Yesterday, data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) showed that 'Excess' Covid-19 deaths in the UK has reached 53,960 in England and Wales from the start of the outbreak to 15 May – that's 4,385 more than the five-year average. Public Health England (PHE) figures released today also show that so far a total of 37,460 people have died, including the 412 who have tragically passed away in the last 24 hours (it's always a lower number than the ONS data published). Also, so far over a quarter of a million people – 267,240 – have been tested positive with Covid-19 in the UK, and 26,867 are from London. Of these, 999 are in Newham.

Earlier this evening, Health Secretary Matt Hancock announced that from 9.00am tomorrow morning (Thursday 28th May), any one with Covid-19 symptoms will be able to get a test, including under 5-year olds, and if you are one of those you must isolate immediately. **You can book a test on nhs.uk/coronavirus or by calling 119.**

Also starting tomorrow morning, will be the national track and tracing system which aims to break the chain of transmission, where those tested as Covid-19 positive, will be contacted within 24-hours. They will establish who you have been in contact with, and may have infected; and this could be anyone that you've been in contact with for more than 15 minutes – including people in your own household. Remember, Covid-19 transmission is likely to be higher based on your social contacts and who you've been 'networking' with. The national system will be supported by plans across each local authority, to tackle local waves of Covid-19; and on Friday I announced that Newham is part of 4 Councils in London leading this effort in the capital.

On Monday, the government also announced more lockdown easing measures, as part of this 'phase 2' of its 'Covid-19' recovery. This includes, allowing car showrooms and indoor markets to re-open from next week, and then from June 15 some other 'non-essential' shops can begin to re-open (selling items including clothes, shoes, toys, furniture, books, and electronics). But businesses will only be able to open if they are able to put in place the required 'social distancing' measures for the benefit of customers and employees. This will inevitably put more pressure on space in our high streets, and on the public transport system (which will be restricted in any case); and that's why we are prioritising space for cycling or walking around the borough.

Next Monday, schools are meant to open for more pupils, under guidance issued by the government. As I said last week, they should not open; until it is safe to do so for children, families and staff. I also stated that the Council will not take action against any parent or carer who decides not to send their child to school.

At this evening's Health and Wellbeing Board, we agreed to set up an Expert Advisory Group of clinicians to provide oversight on the risk assessments guidance the Council is providing to schools; so that we have an additional level of assurance for the Council as part of our borough-wide response to Covid-19 in the borough. This means that if the clinical experts don't believe a school's risk assessment is adequate, they will issue a notice of improvements required. More details about this soon, and in the meantime here's another statement about schools opening that the Council will be issuing tomorrow morning:

'Newham Council continues to stand side-by-side with our young people, schools, teachers and parents; and the whole community as we respond to Covid-19 global pandemic and its impact in our borough. We share the deep concern felt by parents, teachers, support staff and school leaders about the Government's proposals that primary schools open to larger numbers of pupils from the 1st of June.

Since the end of March, the vast majority of schools across Newham have been open for children of key workers and vulnerable children, and continue to provide home learning for pupils who have remained in their homes. We commend their efforts, and those of the parents concerned, during this time of national emergency.

While we all want to have more pupils returning to our schools, we only want this to happen as soon as it is safe to do so. That's why the Government has been unhelpful in setting an arbitrary date of 1st June, as a significant majority of our schools in Newham will not be ready by this time.

Last week, the Mayor of Newham expressed her concerns that schools shouldn't reopen on the 1st June due to the underlying health inequalities and deprivation that have led to a disproportionate impact on residents, particularly those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities. All these factors mean that our residents are more vulnerable in the event of a second wave of COVID-19. This is why the Council has announced it won't take action against any parent or carer that decides against sending their child to school on the 1st June.

The Mayor and Council believe that it is important that the Government ensures that the necessary conditions are met before it makes the decision that it is safe for children to return to school. For this reason, the Council is demanding that the Government and Public Health England provide it with timely and complete Covid-19 related infection and transmission data for the borough, because at present this is not being provided. The Council also needs the resources to support the regular testing of children, staff and a whole school.

All schools are conducting risk assessments specific to each school's local circumstances and context. Newham Council is establishing an Expert Advisory Group comprising of clinical practitioners, to provide additional advice and assurance to support the risk assessments being developed by schools in Newham.

While the Council provides advice and guidance, ultimately it is the school's Governing Body which determines if a school should open. The vast majority of schools in Newham have decided that the 1st June is not the appropriate time to open for more pupils, and we welcome the conclusions that they have reached.

We are all coming together to work collaboratively to reduce the risk of Covid-19 spreading in our borough, prevent a second wave and save lives. That's why we believe that schools in Newham should only open further when they will be safe places for staff and pupils.'

We've been proud of our teachers, school staff and parents who have worked together during the Covid-19 lockdown and will continue to work to support them in the coming weeks and months ahead. They know that we all need to come together to work collaboratively on this; so we reduce the risk of Covid-19 spreading in our borough, prevent a second wave and save lives together as a united Newham community.

Finally, I wanted to share this wonderful video I was sent by 'Act Up Newham!'; the brilliant Newham-based inclusive theatre company create high quality performances that challenge audiences' perceptions of disability.

Since the start of the lockdown, they've continued their inspirational work virtually, so I hope you enjoy watching this as much as I have. It really brought a smile to my face during this time of challenge: https://youtu.be/4h_OmvaBoFc.

Stay well and 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

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