

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

**IT'S ALL ABOUT THE 'R': IT'S RISING AGAIN
AND WE ARE AT RISK OF A SECOND WAVE**

**Mayor Rokhsana Fiaz
Friday June 5 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

In the past days, we have seen the justified angry reaction of the Britain's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities, to events on the world and domestic stage. Our Government's weak and ineffective response to the scandal of disproportionate Covid-19 deaths among ethnic minorities has raised the levels of anxiety for many of our residents.

Their inaction stands in stark contrast to the unseemly haste with which we have been told to return to work, school and regular life. That includes relaxing restrictions for the most vulnerable residents whom 11 weeks ago received a letter from the NHS saying that they are part of a 'shielded' group that must stay at home for their safety. The Government has insisted it is following the science – but according to its own five steps of recovery – we have not reached a level to justify this level of relaxation of lockdown.

Today we learnt that the 'R' value in England, in other words the reproduction rate of Covid-19, has risen to between 0.7 and 1; with north-west of England experiencing an increase to 1.01 for the first time since the height of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In my statement to Newham residents on 15th May I reported that London's Covid-19 'reproduction' rate had gone down to 0.4 (from about 2.8 before lockdown). I raised concerns that this could give the wrong impression that London is no longer at risk. Today we've found out that it has now increased to 0.95 according to Cambridge University's *MRC Biostatistics Unit* 'real-time' monitoring of Covid-19.

This unit feeds directly to a sub-committee of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) called the *Scientific Pandemic Influenza sub-group on Modelling (SPI-M)* and to regional Public Health England teams, and you can read the monitoring report here: <https://www.mrc-bsu.cam.ac.uk/now-casting/>. Following the publication of their latest analysis, a spokesperson for the Cambridge University team said the increase was 'probably due to increasing mobility and mixing between households and in public and workplace settings', and that from mid-June we could start seeing another rise in deaths.

This is extremely worrying for London and for us living here in Newham because of other risk factors such as health inequality, poverty and population density which can have a disproportionate impact on virus infection and death rates, especially when 73% of our residents are ethnic minority. Today's reported increase of the Covid-19 reproduction rate is clear evidence that the loosening of lockdown restrictions will lead to an increase in infections

and more deaths. That's why I support calls by leading scientific and medical experts who have called on the prime minister to establish a public inquiry to prepare for a second wave, otherwise many more people will die. You can read the letter here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/05/covid-inquiry-vital-before-second-wave>

Tonight the UK's official toll of reported deaths after a positive Covid-19 test across all settings passed the horrifying 40,000 milestone, with Public Health England (PHE reporting that a total of 40,261 people have died in hospitals, care homes and in community settings, up by 357 since yesterday. Meanwhile, 283,331 people have been tested positive with Covid-19 in the UK (an increase of 1,650 since yesterday) and 27,099 are from London. Of these, 1,003 are from Newham (which is strange, because on Monday this figure was listed by PHE as being 1,005 and yesterday they listed 1,004).

Meanwhile, for the fourth night running, council buildings in Newham will turn purple in solidarity for George Floyd, the black African-American who died in Minnesota last week after being killed by police officers. The Council is also backing calls from the Labour Party, and many of our own residents, for an end to UK exports of anti-riot equipment to the United States. In a letter to the Government, Shadow Secretary of State for International Trade, Emily Thornberry said: *'...the UK has recently issued licenses for the export of a variety of riot control projectiles and equipment to the United States.... If there is any risk these projectiles and equipment being in used in the United States against peaceful, unarmed civilians, the government must act immediately to stop their export'*.

Our stance on this is in line with our policy to oppose the international arms trade, including our commitment to oppose the annual arms trade air at the ExCeL centre in the Royal Docks.

The anger and concern about the institutionalised racism in the US has been mirrored here in the UK, where our young people in particular have been expressing their anger at the disproportionate 'criminalisation' of young people from ethnic minority communities. Here in Newham we have been working hard with our young people to build a better borough, where they can thrive and flourish. Throughout the pandemic, our Youth Empowerment division has kept its programme of activities going by switching online; and we've got an outreach team of youth workers meeting with young people at a social distance to give them advice and help. On Monday, I'll be speaking to a number of our young people through another Zoom chat, to talk about the killing of George Floyd, #BlackLivesMatter and what we are doing at the Council to tackle racism and racial inequality. If you are a young person in Newham, aged between 10 and 24 (or know one!), you can find out more and sign up here: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/DigitalYouthZones>.

It is imperative that all decision makers take the voice of our young generation into account, we need to understand how they feel, what they need to feel safe and valued, and how we can deliver on the promise to make Newham the best place in country for children and young people to grow up.

On the subject of keeping in touch, yesterday we set up an online survey to gauge parents and carers' feelings about sending their children back in to school. I'm delighted we have had a great response so far. We really want as many parents and carers as possible to take part in this survey, because it will help us feedback information to our schools, to the Department for Education, and the Government about what parents and carers really feel about schools opening to more children.

The survey only takes five minutes to complete, closes at the end of Thursday 11 June, and you can take part in the survey here: <https://wh1.snapsurveys.com/s.asp?k=159128816963>.

As we approach the weekend, please remember that we are still in the midst of a global Covid-19 pandemic. So please take all precautions, observe social distancing, avoid public transport where possible, and wear face coverings. Continue to follow personal hygiene measures, wash your hands, avoid touching your face and if you are in an at-risk group, or have vulnerable people in your household, please think very carefully about the risks involved. Stay at home will be best.

As always, please continue to play your part in protecting yourself, family, friends and our community here in Newham.

Stay safe.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rokhsana Fiaz', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rokhsana Fiaz
Mayor of Newham
People at the Heart
of Everything We Do