

**UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):  
COVID-19 SCHOOLS U-TURN, INFORMATION ABOUT VIRUS IMPACT ON BAME COMMUNITIES  
WITHHELD, SUPPORT BUBBLES AND MORE EASING OF RESTRICTIONS FROM MONDAY  
MAYOR FIAZ**

**FRIDAY 12 JUNE 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

As we come to the end of another week of the Covid-19 crisis, and ahead of #BlackLivesMatter solidarity events across the country, we found out today that a crucial Public Health England (PHE) report that could be live-saving for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities has been withheld by the Government.

The BBC has revealed that the PHE report, *'Beyond the Data: Understanding the Impact of Covid-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Communities'*, containing recommendations on actions that need to be taken to safeguard the impact of Covid-19 on BAME communities as well as evidence from 4,000 individuals and organisations, was ready to be published.

An initial report by PHE, which was published last week and widely criticised for lacking any recommendations, found that people of Bangladeshi heritage were dying at twice the rate of white Britons, while other Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups had between 10% and 50% higher risk of death. At the time, the Government said that it was not for PHE to draw up recommendations, as this work was to be carried forward in a new report by a junior minister, Kemi Badenoch MP, who said in Parliament that PHE *'did not make recommendations because they were not able to do so'*.

However today Professor Raj Bhopal, an emeritus professor of public health at Edinburgh University who was asked to peer-review the report by PHE, told the BBC that Parliament *'had not been told the truth'*. Despite Matt Hancock saying that #BlackLivesMatter, the Government has now been rumbled (again), and has announced that it will publish the report next week. You can read the full BBC report here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-53002968>.

That the Government has delayed the publication of vital life-saving advice for over two weeks that could help BAME communities who are disproportionately affected by the virus is simply despicable.

It's no surprise that trust in the Government is eroding even further, as other news emerged this week that a former member of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), Professor Neil Ferguson, told the Commons Science Committee that the death toll could have been halved had lockdown been introduced a week earlier than 23<sup>rd</sup> March. He said: *'The epidemic was doubling every three to four days before lockdown interventions were introduced. So had we introduced lockdown measures a week earlier, we would have reduced the final death toll by at least a half'*. You can watch Professor Ferguson's full comments here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edZQbM6CLaI>

I know that with the benefit of hindsight and what we now know about the Covid-19, many lessons will need to be learnt, but we need to start that process as soon as possible because as the Government eases restrictions, the risks of a rapid rise in infections remains real, as do more deaths as a consequence.

Today, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) also published another report on the impact of deprivation and Covid-19 deaths. It shows that between March and May, London had the highest age-standardised mortality rate from the virus, which was statistically significantly higher than any other region in England, with nine of the ten local authorities with the highest mortality rates for deaths involving COVID-19 being in the Capital.

This includes Brent with the highest rate of 210.9 deaths per 100,000 population; followed by Newham at 196.8 deaths per 100,000 population and Hackney at 182.9 deaths per 100,000 population. However once lock down was introduced on 23<sup>rd</sup> March, the mortality rates for all London boroughs decreased rapidly with Newham's rate dropping to 15 deaths per 100,000 in May. This is real evidence that backs up Professor Ferguson's evidence to the Common's Science Committee.

In Newham our own Public Health team has repeatedly said that by the time lockdown was introduced the virus had already taken a firm, and disastrous hold in London, including of course in our borough. This has led to the tragedy of at least 294 deaths in Newham alone.

With our vulnerability in terms of ethnicity, deprivation, housing poverty and employment profile, this borough has paid the highest price for the Government's prevarication and lack of transparency. I am determined that as we enter the recovery phase, this cost is repaid in full by the Government.

That is why for the second time during this crisis I have written to the Prime Minister demanding extra support for the communities who have borne the brunt of the pain this pandemic has unleashed. In my letter sent yesterday, I told the Prime Minister:

*'We currently need to spend around £150,000 per week just to meet the needs of our most vulnerable residents. Newham has already provided over 32,000 deliveries of food and supplies over the pandemic. Without substantial additional funding based on an enhanced equitable formula - previously referred to in my last letter to you in the form of a 'COVID-19 Deprivation premium' - Newham residents will once again be further significantly disadvantaged. That is why, I am urging you and your Government to apply a COVID-19 Deprivation Premium to ensure that funding properly reflects the scale of the challenge we face in tackling deprivation, and to recognise the significant impact that COVID-19 has had, and will continue to have, on communities like ours here in Newham. We want to do whatever it takes to help our most vulnerable residents during this crisis, but we need more money to do so.'*

You can read the full letter here: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/downloads/file/1344/boris-johnson-re-funding-for-food>

On Tuesday, the Government finally heeded the warnings of teachers and schools (and the worries of parents), when it confirmed that its plan for all primary school years to go back to school before the end of term has been dropped. It was always a misguided approach and the climb down was long overdue; and will be a huge relief for many parents, teachers and schools. But we need a national Covid-19 education recovery strategy, to make sure children

don't lose out from school and education when we get to the start of the new academic year in September. We are already working on plans for a summer of 'catch-up' learning and education for young people in the borough. More details about that soon.

On Wednesday a report from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), warned that the UK economy is likely to suffer the worst damage from the Covid-19 crisis of any country in the developed world. Today, we also learnt from the ONS that Britain's economy shrank by a record 20.4% in April, three times greater than the 2008/09 financial crash and that no area of the economy was left unscathed.

In a borough, which already suffers from inequality in wealth, health, housing and employment, it is clear the inevitable recession will hit our residents harder than in relatively more prosperous areas. This means areas like Newham will need extra financial support, not only to fund the work we have already done during the pandemic, but to support the work we will need to do to protect our people from the looming recession. It is clear that the Government must target recovery funding to support those communities most in need.

From next Monday, we will see further significant changes to lockdown restrictions, when many shops, markets, and shopping centres re-open for business. The Council has been working hard on our high streets, and with our businesses, to ensure re-opening can be achieved in line with Government social distancing and hygiene guidelines, and provided retailers can demonstrate they have completed a coronavirus risk assessment and are complying with the guidance. Places of worship will also be allowed to re-open from Monday but for individual private prayer only. Communal worship is expected to be included in a future phase of the Government's recovery plan from 4 July at the earliest.

If you have symptoms of Covid-19 (a new cough, fever or change in your sense of taste or smell) please don't rush back to the shops for the sake of your health and for the safety of others. Please isolate immediately, stay at home and book a test via [nhs.uk/coronavirus](https://nhs.uk/coronavirus) or by **calling 119**.

Also don't rush to the shops if you live with people who have health conditions and are extremely vulnerable to catching the virus, think about how they can continue to be protected and avoid the risk of becoming infected from the virus and potentially seriously ill.

I know that many residents will be planning to go to various #BlackLivesMatter solidarity events to keep the focus on action for race equality and racial justice for Black people in this country (and across the world). Please think carefully about your safety - and always practise social distancing - because I'm worried about the news that far-right groups are planning counter demonstrations and it could become dangerous.

Next week, I'll be bringing you more details of a project that the Council will be launching about streets, memorials and buildings named after leading figures of the slave trade in this country, which will involve discussions with our residents and what we can do about renaming them. So keep an eye out.

This weekend our town halls will be lit up green as we remember the 72 people who died three years ago on Sunday in the fire at Grenfell Tower in Kensington. It was a terrible tragedy that should never have happened and the anniversary is a time to remember, reflect but also call for urgent action from the Government to deal with all those remaining residential properties that still have lethal cladding.

As you settle in for the evening and prepare for the weekend ahead, please continue to play your part in protecting yourself, family, friends and our community here in Newham.

For those of you who are allowed to form a 'support bubble' from midnight on Saturday, enjoy your time with your loved ones. These 'support bubbles' will allow adults living alone and single parents/carers with children under 18-years-old, to link up with one other household (acting as one household), enabling them to stay over in each other's homes without having to adhere to the two-metre rule. The aim is to help those who have been left isolated by the lockdown, but if anyone in the 'support bubble' households display any symptoms of Covid-19, then all those involved will need to isolate immediately.

So 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**