

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

NEWHAM AT THE FOREFRONT OF NEW COVID-19 TRACING APP, UK RECESSION, UNEMPLOYMENT SET TO RISE AND EXAM RESULTS DEBACLE

FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ

FRIDAY 14th AUGUST 2020

Dear Newham Resident,

It's been blistering hot and busy week in Newham, with temperatures tipping the mercury past 36 degrees and the borough at the focus of national media attention when the Department of Health announced Newham had been chosen to launch the new Track and Trace COVID-19 mobile phone app, alongside the Isle of Wight and NHS volunteers, prior to the national roll-out in a few weeks.

The new app, which has been developed with the help of technology giants Google and Apple with the highest standards of data privacy and data security, will be rolled out to each Newham resident who will be sent an email or letter with a unique code to allow them to install the app on their SMART phone next Friday. It includes a range features which are designed to be easy to use, including 'infection spike' alerts based on postcode, a digital tool that allows you to scan a 'QR' code (quick response) when you check-in at venues such as a restaurant, a symptom checker and easy to access test booking.

In Newham, some 240 languages and dialects are spoken and our residents literally have a connection to almost every country in the world. That's why we don't subscribe to the idea that some communities are 'hard to reach', rather there are some communities whose voices haven't been heard through generic national government messages about Covid-19. That's why I'm really pleased that the app will also be available in multiple languages, including English, Urdu, Punjabi Gujarati, Bangla and Polish. When it's rolled out across the country, more languages will be available too.

The app will help you understand if you are at risk of infection so you can take action to protect yourselves and our wider community. Importantly, the app will work alongside our rigorous hyper local contact tracing and testing set-up already offered within Newham and driven by the Council's public health team, who work closely with our GPs and local health partners to help minimise the spread of Covid-19 in Newham.

Right now the very best approaches we have to reduce the spread of Covid-19 are through social distancing, hand-washing and wearing face coverings. But importantly, we know that you can't beat Covid-19 without traditional contact tracing. Testing is vital and tracing is equally important, as Covid-19 is spread by many

people who have no symptoms at all. Tracing helps us to know if we have been in close contact with people with Covid-19 so that we can isolate and not risk accidentally spreading Covid-19 in our community. The app will be a welcomed addition in our borough where the risk of Covid-19 transmission has been high and we have experienced some of the most significant and distressing effects of Covid-19 due to the health inequalities and vulnerabilities that exist, and where we know our residents are particularly at risk to both the health, economic and disproportionate effects of the virus, especially for our ethnic minority communities.

Public Health England, collaborating with Newham, has recognised our innovative approach to creating a unique array of local Covid-19 resources to support our community through this unprecedented time of challenge in the country, such as our Covid-19 health champions which has been recognised as a best practise model being adopted by other local authorities. That's why, in close collaboration with all our local health partners, all our Covid-19 interventions are driven by the absolute focus to support our diverse communities in navigating the challenges of living with the risks of Covid-19 and mitigate the spread of the virus in the borough.

Being part of this 'early adopter' phase, prior to the national roll-out, offers us the opportunity to add another resource to reduce the risk of Covid-19 exposure with our communities and enhances the great work being done by the public health team here in Newham with our health partners. You can read about the app announcement here: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/news/article/488/new-nhs-test-and-trace-app-to-be-rolled-out-to-newham-residents-to-beat-covid-19>.

The announcement that Newham was at the forefront of rolling out the new app, came on the day that the government confirmed that it has added France back to the quarantine list of countries, alongside the Netherlands, Monaco, Malta, Turks & Caicos and the island of Aruba. So Britons returning from these countries from 4am on Saturday will need to isolate for 2 weeks when they return.

Earlier today, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) released data suggesting that rates of people testing positive for Covid-19 in England is levelling off. The data, which covers the period from 3 to 9 August, reveals about one in 1,900 people in the community are now thought to have the virus, with an estimated 3,800 new cases a day. This comes in the week when it was revealed that the government removed 1.3 million Covid-19 tests from its data because of double counting, lowering the figure by some 10 percent and changing the way it measured positive Covid-19 cases.

As well as that, Public Health England (PHE) figures today show that there's been a total of 316,367 Covid-19 lab-confirmed cases in the UK so far, and 41,358 Covid-19 associated UK deaths recorded 'within 28 days of being tested Covid-19 positive'. In London, so far 36, 838 people have been tested positive for Covid-19 with 1,386 from Newham. Sadly 309 people in Newham have lost their lives to Covid-19 and my deepest condolences to all families affected by the loss of their loved ones.

This week the UK economy officially went into recession, with a 20.4 percent contraction between April and June - representing the biggest slump ever on record. We also found out from the ONS that there are now 730,000 fewer people with jobs in the UK than there were in March when the Covid-19 outbreak began. The Prime Minister finally admitting that the country is going to face 'bumpy months ahead'.

Many economists are fearing the worst is yet to come, because while the official jobless rate remains unchanged from its level when lockdown began (it stands at 3.9 per cent), there are more than 12 million people who are not working, but whose wages are being paid by the government through the furlough or self-employed support scheme. So as those schemes come to an end between now and the end of October the unemployment figure is likely to rise.

The government also announced further easing of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions, allowing wedding receptions, sporting events and indoor performances to resume from tomorrow. That includes the reopening of casinos, bowling alleys and skating rinks. Beauty salons, tattoo studios and spas can offer close 'services and treatments'.

However, tougher penalties have also been introduced for people who repeatedly fail to wear face masks in public places, with fines doubling each time someone is found in breach of the rules. Anyone failing to wear a face covering while shopping has been subject to a fine of up to £100, or £50 if paid within 14 days, and now this will increase to a maximum of £3,200 in total. Hairdressers are also now be required to wear surgical face masks. As well as that, the government announced that anyone hosting an illegal rave or gathering of more than 30 people will be issued spot fines, possibly up to £10,000.

It's also been a challenging week for our A Level and BTEC pupils, who finally learnt the results of the government's flawed Covid-19 grades assessment system. Early analysis suggests the results this year across Newham show a slight increase in performance by pupils in Newham's schools and colleges. But this exam season has been one like no other, as all examinations were cancelled this year due to Covid-19 and pupil grades based on more complicated assessments.

The national figures released by the exam regulator, Ofqual showed 39% of teacher assessments were downgraded by one or more grades through the standardisation process that followed. This means that almost 40% of pupils were expecting higher grades than they received. With many schools and colleges expected to challenge their pupil's grades Newham's results are likely to increase when the outcomes of the appeals are known.

For any pupil in Newham who feels they have lost out, please make sure you use the appeals process so that you are properly recognised for your hard work. Despite the difficult circumstances, well done for your dedication and resilience during this challenging time. This really has been a ridiculous grading debacle.

As always, as you plan for the weekend ahead, please stay safe and do your bit to help keep the transmission of Covid-19 in Newham low. If you fancy some Covid-19 safe entertainment, check out our virtual summer festival, Newham Unlocked, which kicked off today with three days of music, dance and creative performances recorded or taken place live till Sunday. Watch here: <https://www.newhamunlockedbroadcasts.org/>

Best wishes,

Rokhsana Fiaz
Mayor of Newham

People at the Heart
of Everything We Do