

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

LONDON FACING TIER 3 RESTRICTIONS AS IT HAS THE HIGHEST COVID-19 RATES IN ENGLAND AND NEWHAM MAYBE BE ONE OF SEVERAL AREAS TO GET 'TARGETED' COVID-19 ACTION

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ
THURSDAY 10th DECEMBER 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

I hope you and your loved ones are well, as we end the week with a range of contrasting Covid-19 developments. There's been some really good news on the vaccination plans being rolled out by the NHS, but some deeply worrying updates on infection rates in the capital - specifically north-east London, including Newham.

During the course of this week, I've been in various urgent meetings with other local leaders as we keep a close check on the growing number of cases, rising infection rates and the prospects of London being moved into Tier 3 becoming closer to a reality. In spite of the recent national lockdown, the number of people testing positive for the virus is rising across all age groups in the Capital, and the region now has the highest infection rate in the whole of England.

The rate will need to come down significantly by next Wednesday 16th December - the time the current Tier 2 status for London is reviewed by the government – otherwise we are faced with a very different type of Christmas than the one we were hoping for. It means that all of us must be part of a collective effort to follow all the current public health advice and stick to the restrictions in place.

In Newham, more than 1,000 people tested positive for Covid-19 during the past week, an increase of 23 percent on the previous week, and 11 people died within 28 days of a positive Covid-19 test. You can read about the borough's statistics on our Covid-19 dashboard here: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-dashboard/1>

Earlier today, at a Downing Street briefing, the Health Secretary Matt Hancock said he was 'particularly concerned' about the number of cases in London, Kent and Essex, and that test data showed that cases were rising fastest among secondary school children, aged 11 to 18. He added that while the rate among adults in London was 'broadly flat', the rise in young people was likely lead in rises in other age group, and immediate 'targeted action' is required.

So tomorrow, we'll find out further details as he'll be outlining plans to offer targeted testing to secondary school age pupils in parts of North East London, Essex and Kent, to combat the rise in Covid-19 among under 18 year olds in these areas. That could include Newham.

Despite this very worrying situation, there has been some good news earlier this week, when we heard that 90-year-old grandmother Margaret Keenan become the first person in the world to receive the Covid-19 vaccination outside of clinical trials. You can read more here: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-55227325>

Starting with people aged over 80 and care home workers, the much-needed vaccine rollout is now officially underway. In Newham, we have received our first tranche of vaccines and work to get this to the priority group is now underway – and all being well this could start as early as next Monday. While it will be many months before the vaccine has spread far enough for us to be able to live differently; the Government's Chief Scientific Officer Sir Patrick Vallance, has warned that the public may need to wear face-masks for another year - despite the rollout of a coronavirus vaccine.

Onto other good news this week, I am really pleased that we have started to offer Covid-19 'lateral flow tests' (LFT) to those working with vulnerable people in Newham, such as carers in day centres, which will enable faster results. As well as this, mobile testing units will be set up in the next few days to allow for testing of those without symptoms, including school children, so that we can try to detect the virus and stop it in its tracks before it reaches more people.

It may seem strange that after many months of urging people to only be tested if they are experiencing symptoms, we are now encouraging more widespread testing. But it is essential that we do everything we can to bring down infection rates, and that's why I am glad the government has finally enabled this to happen. More information on the location of the new testing sites, who should access them and how will be made available in the next couple of days so please keep an eye on the council's website and social media channels for further information.

All of this leads me to give further thought to the coming school holidays and to the Government's decision to relax restrictions to allow families to come together in bigger groups, and from different households, over Christmas.

People are understandably desperate to see their loved ones after so long in lockdown and away from family members. But please, I would urge everyone to think very carefully before making plans for Christmas. By staying apart now and instead waiting for the vaccine to reach more people, we will be better able to come together with our loved ones in the months ahead. We must be clear that more infections will lead to more deaths. That's a very high price to pay, and I would ask

you all to consider putting celebrations on hold until this devastating pandemic is finally under control.

Even the Chief Medical Officer, has warned of a 'disastrous' resurgence in coronavirus cases if people stop adhering to social distancing guidelines now that the mass vaccination programme has begun. At a committee meeting in Parliament earlier this week, he said: 'I want to be very clear. For the next three months we will not have sufficient protection. The idea we can suddenly stop now because the vaccine is here – that would be really premature, it's like someone giving up a marathon race at mile 16. It would be absolutely the wrong thing to do'.

If you do get together with friends or family this Christmas, please stick to the 'hands, face, space' advice – keep your distance from others, wear a face covering and wash your hands regularly with soap and warm water, or use hand sanitiser.

For those in our borough who have suffered as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, and may be facing hunger or poverty this Christmas, I am pleased that we have launched our Covid Winter Grants scheme, which will ensure we get food and support to those who need it most. You can read more about that here: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/news/article/558/a-christmas-gift-from-marcus-rashford-covid-winter-grants-will-feed-newham-s-children-and-the-most-vulnerable-over-the-holidays>

In other news, I was delighted this week that our planning committee gave the green light to existing plans that will see the heart of London local government – City Hall – relocated to Newham next year. The Mayor of London, London Assembly Members and the Greater London Authority will make the Royal Docks' Crystal Building their home. The move underlines the Royal Docks' status as London's most exciting growth area, and supports plans already in train to bring thousands of new homes and jobs to the area as part of London's first Enterprise Zone. You can read more about the GLA's exciting move to Newham here:

<https://www.newham.gov.uk/news/article/561/mayor-of-london-and-city-hall-move-to-newham-after-planning-gives-the-green-light>.

Finally, I mentioned last week that our 2021/22 budget proposals had been approved by Cabinet. These proposals are now open for comments and feedback, and I would encourage all residents to share their views. There is no denying that the impact of Covid-19 and a decade of funding cuts by central government cuts – which have seen us forced to save around £250m from our budgets in the past 10 years – mean difficult decisions have to be taken. But we have still proposed a positive budget, showing how we will invest in your priorities and in delivering the ambitions set out in our Towards a Better Newham Recovery and Hope strategy. You can read more about our proposals here: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/news/article/556/towards-a-better-newham-council-unveils-2021-22-budget-proposals>. You can also share your

thoughts here: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/council-spending-budgets/engagement-newham-council-budget-2021/1>.

In the meantime, and as always, please take care. Stay safe and look after yourself, your loved ones and please play your part in helping to keep everyone safe in Newham.

Best wishes,

Rokhsana Fiaz OBE
Mayor of Newham

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