

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)
VARIANTS, VACCINES AND BUDGET PROPOSALS TO HELP NEWHAM RESIDENTS
THROUGH COVID-19 HARD TIMES
FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ
THURSDAY 11th FEBRUARY 2021

Dear Newham Resident,

I hope you, your families and loved one are well and safe as we contend with the ongoing challenge of Covid-19, as well as the snow conditions this week – which would have been fun for our youngsters in the borough but could have been dangerous for our elderly and vulnerable residents. We've been working on gritting the roads across all our major roads and high streets, plus areas around all our Covid-19 testing and vaccination sites. You can read more about what we've been doing in response to the severe weather conditions here [insert hyperlink: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/public-health-safety/severe-weather-conditions>].

On the Covid-19 front, this week Public Health England (PHE) issued a statement about a new variant 'under investigation' that has been discovered and another 'variant of concern' – and you can read more about these here [insert hyperlink: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/phe-statement-on-variant-of-concern-and-new-variant-under-investigation>]. Being investigated by the 'New and Emerging Respiratory Virus Threats Advisory Group' (NERVTAG), which advises the Chief Medical Advisor, SAGE, and the Department of Health and Social Care, experts have classified a coronavirus mutation first identified in Bristol as a 'variant of concern', and the one under investigation, was discovered in Liverpool.

So far, PHE has identified 76 cases of these two new variants, and say that they have 'a high degree of confidence that the vaccines will work against variants'; and the government has launched door-to-door testing in parts of the country (including in London) where the other South African variant has been identified.

While that is good news, we must remain vigilant, as the UK recorded another 678 deaths and 13,494 positive cases of Covid-19 in the last 24 hours; and another 1,842 people admitted to hospital. On the vaccine front, more than 13.5 million people in the UK have had at least one vaccine dose as of 10 February.

Medical experts this week have also aired concerns about the potential low take-up by some ethnic minority communities - and you can watch a video of England's Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Professor Jonathan Van-Tam talk about this and his

worry about the spread of fake news about the vaccines here too [insert link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-56008081>]. In a borough like Newham, where 73 percent of our resident population are from ethnic minorities, it is a worry for me too. I want all our residents protected and would urge you to not to be worried about getting vaccinated when your time comes, as we must all work together to halt the spread of Covid-19.

That's why we have launched a programme of fortnightly Covid-19 vaccination information sessions, to find out more from our Public Health team, Newham NHS and medical experts. We've also launched a 'Vaccine Peer Support' [insert hyperlink: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-19-vaccination/9>] network of residents who are kept updated about the vaccines. So if you're interested in becoming one, or attending one of the Covid-19 vaccinations information sessions, please email: Linda.Amankwah@newham.gov.uk.

Here in Newham, another 74 residents have tested positive in the last 24 hours following a lab-confirmed or lateral flow test, bringing our 'official' total so far to 33,738 people since the start of the pandemic. Since yesterday, another 3 residents have died, within 28 days of a positive test, bringing the total to 590 deaths (within 28 days of being tested positive); and the number of residents that have 'Covid-19' recorded as cause on their death certificate in the past week stands at 46, bringing that total to 667. My heartfelt condolences to their loved ones.

In the past week, we also know that the number of new cases of Covid-19 has fallen (as have positivity rates) which is really good news – but community transmission continues and the new variant is highly transmissible, so we need to keep alert and follow all the current lockdown restrictions in place. You can read more via our weekly Covid-19 dashboard here [insert hyperlink: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/coronavirus-covid-19/covid-dashboard/1>].

As I sign off for this week, I wanted to let you know that yesterday we published our Budget proposals for the 2021/22 – 22/23 period; as we've had to make changes to the three-year budget we passed last year because of the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's finances. Covid-19 has cost the Council £75 million, and the government hasn't followed through on its promise to us that it would give us the money we need to support and protect you.

From the start of the pandemic, I have worked around the clock to make sure we protect all our residents, because my job as Mayor is to listen your concerns and be your champion. I have heard from so many of you about your struggles and my priority has been to make sure Newham Council supports our community in these awful times.

That's why I've been taking action to support all residents, including our most vulnerable and families hit hard by the crisis. We are making a difference by:

- Providing £500 of support per child per year for working families by guaranteeing Eat for Free for all children in Newham primary schools
- Helping people in overcrowded homes to self-isolate by providing hotels for those who have to self-isolate but can't afford to
- Treating the homeless as people by not just getting them off the streets during the crisis, but providing them with training, support and understanding they need to change keep them in a home.

I am proud of the way our community has stood together since the pandemic. Council has supported voluntary groups to distribute 264,000 food parcels to vulnerable residents. With so many people struggling financially, I have asked Council to do more by setting up a Covid-19 Hardship Relief Fund to help people hardest hit who cannot pay this week's food bill.

It appals me that children in London should ever go hungry. So I have teamed up with some of the world's leading food experts who are going to help me make sure that our young people never have to wake up worrying if they will get a square meal. And please know this, that if you:

- Have lost your job, we're here for you
- Are struggling financially, we can help you
- Are a local business owner, we're working night and day to get business grants to you

As you Mayor, all of us here at the Council are here to help you, your loved ones and families.

You can find out more about the Budget proposals here [insert link: <https://www.newham.gov.uk/council/engagement-newham-council-budget-2021>], and in the meantime – stay safe and please continue to follow the Covid-19 guidance.

Best wishes
Rokhsana Fiaz OBE
Mayor of Newham