

**UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):**

**WE ARE GOING TO HAVE TO KEEP GOING  
WITH SOCIAL DISTANCING TO SAVE LIVES IN NEWHAM**

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ**

**6TH MAY 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

Today the government has been trailing its new approach to the coronavirus crisis. At Prime Minister's Questions in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister used a new catchphrase as he prepares to ease some lockdown restrictions, which we'll find out about on Sunday, shifting from 'we're all in this together' to 'let's keep going'.

The numbers of those that died from Covid-19 rose by 649 today and we've missed the 100,000 daily testing target for four days in a row; reflecting the true state of affairs we face in this country and in this borough: we are in this for the long haul, and we have a tricky road ahead of us.

Those infected in the UK stands at 201,101 rising by 6,111 in the last 24 hours. In London the figure stands at 25,357, of which 964 are residents from Newham. We've already seen from the statistics released last week that boroughs such as Newham, with high levels of health, income and housing inequality have been hit hardest by this crisis.

Tomorrow there will be new figures from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) updating us how the Covid-19 disease has impacted the Black Minority and Ethnic communities (BAME), and people working in different occupations.

I suspect these figures will simply confirm what we already know: while we may have been 'in it together', coronavirus is no social leveller. Our community has suffered more than others and deserves a level of government funding that reflects our greater need. We should be given a 'Covid-19 deprivation' premium to help us with the impact now and in the future as we deal with this public health crisis. In Newham we can't risk a second wave of the Covid-19 in the borough because the impact will be devastating.

At today's Downing Street briefing, the Secretary of State for local government said that the government is looking at easing of lock down so that the 'whole country moves as one'. Just as this government was slow to introduce lock down – this approach appears to suggest Whitehall is failing to recognise the different impact the virus has on local communities.

We cannot risk a second wave of virus bringing with it more death. We need government to work with us, listen, and not see 'the new normal' as a one size fits all solution. Any solution must take account of local risks such as those that exist in Newham because of deprivation and health inequalities that disproportionately impact BAME communities.

So, when the Prime Minister lays out his 'road map' for easing the lockdown this Sunday, I'm asking that he should exercise extreme caution. If you don't believe me please watch this plea from a young Newham resident, Omar Islam, who lost his father to COVID-19 two weeks ago and also his aunt last Friday: <https://tinyurl.com/y7h4v3s6>.

In his interview with Sky News today, he spoke about how his father's good friend also died from it, as did a neighbour on his road and an elderly couple two streets away. Right now, his uncle is battling the virus: 'when it first happened, I thought - a couple of hundred have died - it's not my dad, it's not anyone I know. Then all of a sudden it is someone you know. And that's when you realise this is real. This is a serious thing'.

In response to plans by the government to 'slowly lift' the lockdown restrictions in place, he said that they are 'stupid' and that 'lifting the restrictions will make it worse'. So my plea to the Prime Minister and his Cabinet is to please listen to residents like Omar in our community who are scared and anxious about the plans you are considering.

As it is, we know that we can't return back to normal. Today the Mayor of London said whatever the plans announced on Sunday, the situation in London has changed for the foreseeable future. The London Underground will only be run at 20% capacity, and buses could only allow 15 passengers of essential workers. That means many Londoners, including Newham residents, will have to continue working from home.

Over the last seven weeks of Lockdown Britain, the Council has understandably received an increasing number of complaints suggesting widespread flouting of the social distancing measures and unnecessary travelling in the borough have led to Newham's high mortality rate published by the ONS last Friday, which analysed a seven week period (from the 1<sup>st</sup> March to the 17<sup>th</sup> April). While we now know that deprivation and health inequalities are significant contributory factors; we also know the vast majority of Newham residents have been following the rules since the introduction of the lockdown measures - and have helped us all in containing the spread of the virus in the borough.

Evidence from hospital figures shows that this has effectively helped contain the spread of the virus and illness locally. Lockdown was only introduced by the government on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March and tragically, by this time Covid-19 had already spread significantly across Newham and East London. That led to a rapid rise in hospital admissions for COVID-19 in the borough, because for at least a month prior to the government taking lockdown action, the virus was spreading like wildfire.

From early April, when admissions for Covid-19 were peaking in our local hospitals, numbers soon dropped considerably. The reduction in admissions was followed by a fall in the numbers in intensive care, and ultimately the number of those residents

dying. Today the number of hospital admissions are far lower than they were at the start of April, and they continue to decrease in numbers.

None of this would have happened if social distancing in Newham was not working; and we have to keep this up, even when we find out about the government's plans on Sunday. Where there have been pockets of non-compliance, our officers have done all they can to challenge it within scope of their powers, and resources. Yesterday I told you about a targeted enforcement action on some of our high streets in the borough, and the update from that so far is as follows:

A total of 42 business premises were investigated, of which 37 were concerning because they were either trading unlawfully or not following social distancing guidelines within their premises. Of these:

- 17 premises were found to be trading unlawfully and were given verbal advice. The premises all complied with that advice at the time and closed. They will be subject to another visit to keep a check on their required compliance.
- 14 premises were given advice regarding the management of social distancing on the premises.
- 3 prohibition/closure notices were served on businesses who didn't follow the when verbal advice to close.
- 2 Fixed Penalty Notice fines were served for breach of a prohibition notice that had been served previously.
- 1 business suspected of unlawfully trading will be visited again, because Council officers couldn't gain access.

So my thanks to the vast majority of Newham residents and local businesses for keeping up with the restrictions, especially in a borough where many of you do not have access to your own garden or where you live in small and cramped properties.

Please keep up with the personal hygiene requirements, social distancing and other restrictions in place, because so far we have kept the death numbers low in Newham. We can't risk another peak in our borough and endure the pain of more people dying.

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**