

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

**ONS STUDY OF COVID-19 PREVALENCE IN THE UK IS LOW
WHICH MEANS WE ARE STILL ALL AT RISK**

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ
15TH MAY 2020 (AM)**

Dear Newham Resident,

I hope you are well at the end of another Covid-19 focused week. Yesterday the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published the provisional results of its first ever pilot household survey of the prevalence of Covid-19 in the population of England. According to their estimates, an average of 148,000 people in England had the Covid-19, equating to 0.27% of the population.

The ONS data, the first national snapshot of Covid-19 rates, also showed children were as likely to catch coronavirus as adults, and that frontline healthcare workers were much more likely to contract it than the general population.

Why does it matter? Because the findings will inform whether it's safe enough to ease restrictions currently in place, including opening more businesses and schools early June. Broadly, experts are saying that the ONS estimate means rates of infection remain 'some way off' to viably lift the lockdown; including the Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England Professor Jonathan Van-Tam, who said that it represents 'very low' circulation of the virus in the community: in other words too many of us are still at risk.

Announced back in April, the 12-month study (which will now be published weekly) aims to track the spread of Covid-19 in the population to try to understand the current rate of infection and how many people have developed antibodies to the virus. The results are based on swab tests performed on a representative sample of the UK population (by age and geography) of 10,705 people from the ages of 2-years old to 70-years old + in 5,276 households. From those, 10,000 adults are also providing a blood sample to find out what proportion of the population has developed antibodies to Covid-19. You can read more about the ONS study here:

<https://tinyurl.com/yatd77ux>.

Also yesterday, another 428 deaths from Covid-19 in the UK have been reported since the previous 24 hours, with a total of 33,614 deaths confirmed so far. Note that this Public Health England (PHE) figure differs from the weekly ONS figure of 40,496 that I reported earlier this week, and the reason or the difference can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/yd67vk97>. Essentially, the daily PHE figure reflects all deaths where

a positive test for COVID-19 has been confirmed (wherever that death has taken place) but it misses people who never had a test, as it covers a long period of time when testing was largely limited to hospitals in the UK, and missed most deaths in the community during those weeks. The weekly ONS figure however, covers all Covid-19 deaths formally registered in the week ending 11 days before publication – including the total count of Covid-19 confirmed deaths in care homes in England as well.

The PHE figures from yesterday reflects the lowest increase of deaths from Covid-19 on a non-bank holiday weekday since 31st March. They also showed that in London, 26,113 people were confirmed to be infected with Covid-19, of which 985 are Newham residents.

Despite this worrying picture, I am concerned to read this morning of a new 'modelling' report from PHE and Cambridge University, which is pointing to a fall in the capital's Covid-19 'reproduction' rate (to 0.4, down from about 2.8 before lockdown started); suggesting that fewer than 24 people in London are being infected each day.

According to Cambridge University's *MRC Biostatistics Unit* 'real-time' monitoring of Covid-19, which feeds directly to a sub-committee of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) called the *Scientific Pandemic Influenza sub-group on Modelling (SPI-M)* and to regional PHE teams, London's reproduction rate (known as the 'R') is the lowest in the country. You can read the monitoring report here: <https://tinyurl.com/yd2ddhdp>, and the reason I am concerned is that it could give the wrong impression that London is no longer at risk from Covid-19 or the threat of a second wave.

We all know the limitations of relying solely on the 'R' rate as a measure of any 'reduced' Covid-19 risk across the country – and in particular areas such as London and Newham because of other risk factors such as health inequality, poverty and population density which can have a disproportionate impact on virus infection and death rates.

So despite some of the restriction measures being eased on Wednesday by the government, we are still living in lockdown. The importance for us all to keep following the rules cannot be over-estimated, because we can't risk a second wave infection in Newham as it would be disastrous for all residents.

With social distancing in mind, last night I participated in the Council's first ever Covid-19 virtual interfaith Iftar (breaking of the fast) via Zoom, joining representatives from different faith communities in Newham as Muslim residents in our borough enter the final ten days of Ramadan. During the virtual Iftar on zoom, guests heard from architect Shahed Salim, author of *'The British Mosque: An Architectural and Social History'*. He provided a fascinating overview of Muslim architecture in Britain, from the earliest examples in the late 19th century to the mosques being built today; alongside

interesting insights into the social history of Muslims living the UK. For example, despite Muslim settlement in the UK since the early 18th century, the first purpose-built mosque only opened in 1889.

I was also able to announce to guests that the Council has given permission for 19 mosques in the borough to broadcast a short call to prayer (Adhaan) from today, the first time that this has happened in Newham. The Adhaan is a traditional call to prayer for Muslims all over the world, and during the holy month of Ramadan it especially enables the community to come together in acts of collective worship. But because of Covid-19 this has been stopped, as Mosques and all places of worship are closed because of the requirement to socially distance and stop all gatherings. The Adhaan will be performed at 19 Mosques around the borough every day at Sunset to mark the opening of the fast and on Fridays around 1.30pm – with the first at lunchtime today. Working with the mosques involved, the Adhaan will include a reminder for worshippers to stay at home because of the risks of Covid-19, and you can listen to a beautiful example of one here: <https://tinyurl.com/y7wzk847>.

Last night, for the 8th week running, Newham residents across the borough joined in saluting our heroic front line workers during the national #ClapforKeyWorkers show of solidarity across the UK. While I clapped with others during the virtual Iftar, I reflected on the importance of our #StayAtHome efforts - which are helping our vital frontline key workers who despite the risks they are facing are working hard to save lives.

As always, please think of your well-being and please keep up with the Covid-19 requirements to 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**