

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

**COMMUNITY TESTING & CONTACT TRACING IS URGENT NOW
AS GOVERNMENT APP WON'T BE READY BY 1ST JUNE**

**FROM MAYOR ROKHSANA FIAZ
21ST MAY 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

Once again, it appears as though the Government's much-vaunted 'test, track and trace' programme is in trouble - four months after the first case of Covid-19 in the UK - during which time, the Government ditched community testing and contact tracing back in early March which could have saved thousands of lives.

From the outset, I've been calling for councils like Newham to be driving community testing and contact tracing because like any communicable disease, Covid-19 is best understood as a pattern of local outbreaks rather than a national pandemic with a similar impact in every community. Already we know that the Government's decision to centralise the national programme on testing and contact tracing, has not worked well in areas like shielding the clinically vulnerable.

So it's no surprise, that while the Prime Minister told the House of Commons yesterday that his 'world-beating' system for the UK would be in place by 1st June; many health experts and officials were today expressing doubt that this could be achieved by his deadline date.

The Government's two-pronged approach of 'strengthened' testing and a 'track and trace' strategy comprising of 25,000 call-centre staff and a tracing app – currently being piloted in the Isle of Wight - is already running into trouble. Fears are growing that the app designed to automatically track people who have been close to those confirmed with Covid-19, won't be ready by 1st June because developers are trying to fix glitches uncovered during the pilot.

That aside, what works for the Isle of Wight, won't be right for Newham, Brent or Hackney because we have different community profiles and vulnerabilities because of the pronounced health inequalities and deprivation that exists. That's why I've been calling for a bigger role for councils like Newham to be involved in contact tracing, coupled with localised community testing otherwise we'll risk another wave of Covid-19 infections and deaths. All councils have an unrivalled understanding of their populations, and this must be drawn on if community testing and contact tracing is to be effective. The 'command/control' and 'top-down' approach is costing lives.

Finally, as we once again clapped for our key workers on the frontline tonight, the Prime Minister has rightly been shamed into reversing a decision to levy a surcharge of £400 a year on thousands of migrant health and social care workers. In the Commons yesterday, he insisted this was justified to raise an additional £900 million for the NHS.

The surcharge, which these key workers are forced to pay every year (to cover any healthcare cost they incur while working here) while risking their lives for us, was going to rise to £624 from October. But this evening, the Government was shamed to ditch any levy for health and social care workers, after an outcry.

As I've said before, Covid-19 will be causing ongoing disruption to our lives for a long time. So for now, please stay home and avoid unnecessary travel, socially distance at all times and keep up with the hygiene requirements like washing your hands.

Enjoy the rest of your evening with your loved ones, and as we prepare for another Covid-19 focused day tomorrow, stay safe.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rokhsana Fiaz', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Rokhsana Fiaz
Mayor of Newham

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