

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

PHE REPORT ON COVID-19 IMPACT ON ETHNIC MINORITIES, EXCESS DEATHS REACH 64,500 AND U-TURN ON FREE SCHOOL MEALS A VICTORY FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

**FROM MAYOR FIAZ
TUESDAY 16th JUNE 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

As we progress through another week of Covid-19 'loosened' lockdown, yesterday saw the opening of more retail shops; places of worship on Saturday allowing for private prayer only; and competitive sport starting again but behind 'closed doors'.

Also today, Public Health England (PHE) published its daily figures, showing that so far 298,136 people have been tested positive with Covid-19 in the UK, with 27,345 from London. Of these, 1,009 are Newham residents. PHE data also showed that so far a total of 41,969 people who have tested positive with the virus have died, including the 233 people who have tragically passed away in the past 24 hours.

However, we know that this number doesn't reflect the total number of Covid-19 deaths, which was revealed this morning when the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published its weekly excess deaths data. This showed that between the period 28th December 2019 and 5th June 2020, a total 47,387 deaths attributed to Covid19 were registered in England and Wales, with 732 excess deaths in week 23 – the lowest number of excess deaths in the week ending 5th June since the middle of March. The comparative figure reported by the Government during this period was 37,520.

In terms of the total number of 'excess' deaths in England and Wales, this now stands at 58,579 with around 64,500 more people than usual (in other words deaths from all causes that exceed the five-year average) having died during this period in the UK as a whole. Of this number, more than 16,000 people have died from Covid-19 in UK care homes.

As we reflect on these figures, we hear that the Government deliberates whether to reduce the two-metre social distance rule to one metre, so that remaining parts of the economy can reopen on 4th July. The World Health Organisation (WHO), has advised the Government not to lift any further restrictions, until its contact and tracing system is properly running and effective, because the country is still in a 'very active phase of the pandemic'. This is the NHS contact and tracing programme that the Government has said won't be fully operational till September, and the national tracing app is yet to be launched.

Yesterday, Professor Sir John Bell, who is a member of the Government's Coronavirus Vaccine Taskforce, said that a 'second wave' is now likely.

That's why as part of our ongoing response to the virus, we've announced the launch of our Covid-19 Health Champions network, a new initiative that will empower thousands of Newham residents to remain up to date on the latest advice, so that they can be kept informed and

help their family, friends and other community members to make sense of the latest facts, evidence and guidance about the virus. By disseminating clear information, residents can make informed choices about what's best for them and their families.

Covid-19 Health Champions can be anyone in the community. They might be the person that everyone knows and trusts, or someone less visible who wants to help in whatever way they can. If you want to be involved in the Covid-19 Health Champions network, you can sign up by visiting the Council's website here: www.newham.gov.uk/covidhealthchampions or you can register via phone by calling 020 3373 2777.

Over the weekend, we saw the true and profoundly ugly face of racism in London, when hundreds of far-right extremists took to the streets of capital to 'counter-protest' against #BlackLivesMatter under the guise of 'defending statues'. The Government's response to the scenes of violence and attacks on the police has been rightly condemned; and now the launch of another 'Commission' to look at race disparities and 'wider inequalities' in the country. Its establishment will be supported by the head of policy at Downing Street who in the past has questioned whether institutional racism really exists. That doesn't augur well for building trust and confidence.

Like many, weary of the Government's repetitive naval-gazing on the pivotal issue of racial justice in Britain, what's the point of yet another commission? There have been plenty on race inequality in wealth, health, education, social mobility, employment, life chances, housing, and in the criminal justice system, with hundreds of recommendations. But all we get from the Government is another announcement of another Commission to look at the issues, set up by someone who doesn't understand.

And today, PHE finally published the second report on Covid-19 and the disproportionate impact on Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority communities, but this time with recommendations. This is the report it deliberately withheld from publishing two weeks ago. That's two weeks of life-saving advice that could have been published for the safety ethnic minority communities. You can read the report titled 'Beyond the Data: Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on BAME Communities' here: <https://tinyurl.com/y797mv8c>.

There were several recommendations in total – which didn't reveal anything that hasn't already been known or called for before:

- Mandate comprehensive and quality ethnicity data collection and recording;
- Support community participatory research to understand the social, cultural, structural, economic, religious, and commercial determinants of COVID-19 in BAME communities;
- Develop readily implementable and scalable programmes to reduce risk and improve health outcomes;
- Improve access, experiences and outcomes of NHS, local government and integrated care systems commissioned services by BAME communities;
- Accelerate the development of culturally competent occupational risk assessment tools that can be employed in a variety of occupational settings and used to reduce the risk of exposure to COVID-19;
- Fund, develop and implement culturally competent COVID-19 education and prevention campaigns, working in partnership with local BAME and faith communities to reinforce individual and household risk reduction strategies;
- Accelerate efforts to target culturally competent health promotion and disease prevention programmes for non-communicable diseases;

- Ensure that COVID-19 recovery strategies actively reduce inequalities caused by the wider determinants of health to create long term sustainable change, which should be fully funded and sustained.

Let's see what happens next from the Government, but I am clear about this: we will push for these recommendations to be fully implemented and we'll be making sure that locally, working with all our local health partners including Barts NHS Trust, we will advance this as a priority.

Today, the ONS also released figures that show that jobcentre claims increased by 23 per cent, to 2.8 million people in May. That's a 126 per cent increase from 1.24 million people in March. Last night, at a meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, I discussed the impact that the Covid-19 crisis might have on our budget here in Newham. While at this stage it is difficult to quantify the full figures because of all the ongoing uncertainty, we are undertaking analysis to model the economic impact which will be presented in a report to Cabinet in July. What I do know is that the impact will be significant here in Newham.

That's why I've been calling for more money from the Government, in the form of a Covid-19 Deprivation Premium; and that also needs to be coupled with a significant national programme of helping the unemployed and creating new jobs. I also know that the risks to Newham will mean more of our residents are pushed into poverty and that young people in our borough will suffer needlessly.

That's why I am thrilled that the Government has done another u-turn with the announcement today that free school meals will be made available to eligible families in England through a 'Covid Summer Food Fund'. This follows the campaign launched by 22-year old footballer Marcus Rashford, which will mean some 1.3 million children will be entitled to a voucher worth £15 per week per child. That will mean so much for many children in our borough, and it's a testament to the great things that can be achieved when we continue the demand for positive change.

Take care and stay safe.

Best wishes,

**Rokhsana Fiaz OBE
Mayor of Newham**