

UPDATE ABOUT CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19):

VIRTUAL ENDING OF LOCKDOWN ANNOUNCED BY PM BUT THE RISKS REMAIN AND FINALLY: GOVERNMENT TO FULLY IMPLEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WINDRUSH LESSONS

**FROM MAYOR FIAZ
TUESDAY 23 JUNE 2020**

Dear Newham Resident,

As we enjoy the start of this week's heatwave, this afternoon the Prime Minister in effect announced the virtual ending of lockdown. But.

But at today's final 'daily' Downing Street Covid-19 briefing, the Chief Medical Advisor Chris Whitty said that we have a long, long way to go before the Covid-19 risk is diminished. He added that to at least spring of next year, a significant amount of Covid-19 will be circulating in the country, and that *'for the short to medium term, until this time next year, certainly I think we should be planning for this, for what I consider to be the long haul into 2021.'*

Remember, last week when the Government lowered the Covid-19 alert level from 4 to 3, all four chief medical officers cautioned that the pandemic is not over. Shifting to level 3 means that Covid-19 is considered to be in 'general circulation', not severe but that it remains *substantial*. While the latest Government estimates suggest the reproduction rate – the 'R' rate – of Covid-19 is just under 1 across the country, levels of infection mean that there are still likely to be localised outbreaks. Other experts from the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) have also said today that easing more restrictions all at once risks Covid-19 'gaining a fresh foothold' again.

So what are the changes in England? As well as a new '1 metre plus' social distancing rule replacing the current 2 metres (as long as there is another 'mitigating' factor in place such as a screen, face-covering or hand-washing facilities), from 4th July:

- Two households of up to six people will be able to spend time with each other indoors, including staying the night, but they should remain 'physically distant'
- Pubs and restaurants can open but only if they can do so in a 'Covid-secure' way – that means with more hand-washing, ventilation and table service indoors; but standing at a shared bar won't be allowed. Plus customers may be asked to leave if they don't provide their contact details to enable track and trace in the event of an outbreak and they won't be required to wear face coverings
- Hotels, bed and breakfasts, holiday homes and campsites and caravan parks and boarding houses can also reopen, but any shared areas such as shower, toilet and washing-up facilities will need to be made 'Covid-secure'
- To increase capacity on public transport, people will be able to travel at 1 metre apart, but only if another 'mitigating factor' is in place, such as a face-covering which remains mandatory
- Theatres, museums and galleries will be able to reopen but not for live performances; and if they have cafes, bars and restaurants they'll be able to open also
- Outdoor gyms in parks, libraries, funfairs, theme parks, adventure parks, amusement arcades, model villages, aquariums, wildlife centres, zoos and safari parks can open

- Weddings can be held in places of worship open, but any celebration receptions can only be with one other household of up to 6 people
- Hairdressers and barbers can finally open, so we can all get haircuts if we want too.

Things that still remain closed or 'banned' include concerts and outdoor music festivals, park runs and large running groups, as mass gatherings are still not permitted. Also to remain closed will be gyms, indoor studios, indoor sports facilities, swimming pools and water parks, nail bars/salons, massage and tattoo parlours, bowling alleys, indoor skating, and indoor play areas including soft play because of the risk of transmission.

Yesterday, it was also announced that from 1st August, the 2.2 million people designated as 'NHS Shield' - who have been self-isolating will no longer need to do so. From 6 July, they will be able to meet up outdoors, in a group, with up to five others and form 'support bubbles' with other households, with support packages remaining in place until the end of July to help people transition.

While I understand many of you will be pleased to see vital small businesses and amenities re-opening, it is vital the Government takes on board the message that not all areas of the country are impacted equally by Covid-19. My genuine fear about this relaxation of the rules is that the guidance, which will accompany it, is very complicated and may be hard to follow safely.

During this whole pandemic I have repeatedly warned that Newham is disproportionately vulnerable to the worst and most devastating effects of the virus, be that in terms of the numbers who tragically lost their lives, or the potential for economic carnage, which could follow the inevitable recession we now face. The top down decision making by this Government, to universally relax lockdown across England, pays no heed to the disproportionate threat it poses to Newham.

So, although restrictions are lifted, I urge great caution. In the past 24-hours a further 171 have died from this terrible virus, which means the average daily number of deaths is still at a horrifying 121. The Prime Minister, in his address to the House of Commons, himself conceded the virus has not gone, is not defeated and still poses a great threat. I echo his plea that where it is possible, people should continue to practise two-metre social distancing.

Newham and its residents have already paid the highest price in terms of mortality, and now face the prospect of paying the highest price economically. For a borough which already suffers high levels of deprivation, health, wealth, housing and employment inequality, this is totally unacceptable.

The Government has spoken a great deal about 'levelling-up' the nation's economy, so that relatively deprived areas are not left behind, that's why today I have given my support to demands by the Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, in a letter sent to the Chancellor, that Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) or furlough scheme, is extended beyond the end of lockdown and is targeted at those areas most impacted, like Newham. You can read the press statement with my quote here: <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-calls-for-targeted-extension-of-furlough>

Newham has the highest number of furloughed workers of any local authority in the country, with 50,000 jobs at stake. These jobs must be protected by the Government at all costs and not be allowed to fall off a cliff in October when the scheme is due to end. On March 17, Chancellor Rishi Sunak pledged to "do whatever it takes to see the UK through the crisis." Now is the time to make good on this promise.

I have repeatedly called on the Government for greater financial support based on need – what I have called the Covid-19 Premium. That's why I welcome Sadiq Khan's call for extra financial support for those in most need. Too many Newham residents are in low wage, insecure jobs, and this is another example of the disproportionate impact that Covid-19 is having on our community – 73% of who are from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minorities.

We want to tackle the poverty, inequality and injustice – and yes the racial injustice – that affects our residents by building an inclusive economy. The Council is doing its bit, but we need the Government to act now and back its promises with funding.

News of the easing of lockdown came on the day the Office for National Statistics revealed the number of “excess deaths” – those above the average for the time of year - in the UK since lockdown has now passed 65,000. More than 54,000 of these lost lives were directly linked to Covid, while others may have resulted from the knock-on impact of the pandemic as people delayed seeking medical care or were not reached in time by emergency crews.

In other news today, the Government has pledged to implement all the recommendations, made in the Windrush Lessons Learned Review, which was published in March. Speaking in the House of Commons, Home Secretary Priti Patel said the report was damning about the conduct of the Home Office, and is 'unequivocal about the institutional thoughtlessness towards race and the history of the Windrush generation'. It was also revealed that just £360,000 has so far been awarded in compensation – which amounts to awards to just 60 people. So while I welcome the fact the Government has recognised the failings of the Home Office, it fails to recognise that racism, not 'institutional thoughtlessness' was at the heart of the Windrush scandal.

In 2018 this Newham Council gave unanimous backing to a motion pledging to fight the Government's 'hostile environment policy' which led to the Windrush immigration scandal. We remain committed to this fight, including our demands that the Government remove the inhuman “No Right to Public Funds” policy, which leaves people unable to access the welfare state safety net. The fight is far from over.

So at the end of another busy day – I return to my thoughts on Covid-19. As the Government, eases lockdown further, because the Prime Minister trusts people “to use their common sense in the full knowledge of the risks”, we will continue being vigilant on the emerging evidence to stop a second wave in Newham, and hold the Government to account for the impact of its decision today on our borough.

Please keep safe, and think of the safety of those around you, as you exercise with great caution, the new 'freedoms' announced today.

Take care and stay safe.

Best wishes,

Rokhsana Fiaz OBE
Mayor of Newham