

Update from the Mayor of London on COVID-19 - 21 April

- The Mayor attended the latest COBRA meeting last week where it was confirmed that the UK's social distancing measures would remain in place for at least another three weeks. This was the right decision to take so that we can continue to slow the spread of the virus, protect the NHS and save lives.
- Sadiq is continuing to push the message that it's essential that all Londoners stay at home unless absolutely necessary to protect our NHS and save lives. While health experts have said that we could have reached the peak of this virus, we cannot afford to take this for granted or stop following social distancing rules too soon.
- TfL continues to run as many services as possible. Overall, around a quarter of Tube workers are now off sick or self-isolating, which means it's impossible to run a full service at the moment. The Mayor has been clear that Londoners should not use public transport unless absolutely necessary and that essential journeys should be made outside of rush hour if possible. The majority of Londoners are following the rules, which has reduced journeys on the Tube by 95 per cent.
- Our heroic transport workers are doing a vital job under extraordinarily difficult circumstances to ensure nurses, doctors and other frontline workers can get to work and save lives. The Mayor is doing everything he can to protect them during this health crisis. That's why TfL have now rolled out middle-door only boarding across London's buses. This is on top of all the other measures that have already been put in place to keep drivers as safe as possible, including enhanced cleaning and new protective screens.
- Last week, the Mayor wrote to the Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, urging him to update the Government's advice to make the wearing of non-medical face coverings obligatory when using public transport and in other situations where people can't socially distance. This would not be about asking people to wear medical masks (PPE), which should be reserved for health and social care workers, but re-usable masks, scarves or face coverings that could reduce the risk of the virus spreading and help protect transport staff and passengers. The current advice from the World Health Organisation and Public Health England is that PPE should only be used in healthcare settings. This is clearly different to the changing advice around the world regarding non-medical face coverings.
- The Mayor continues to put pressure on the Government to ensure all the necessary measures are being put in place to support workers, businesses and families through this crisis. Last week, this included writing to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Therese Coffey, about changes that are desperately needed to the welfare system. He also wrote to the First Secretary of State yesterday, asking for clarity and transparency from the Government as it considers different options for eventually exiting lockdown.
- The OBR economic projections last week and employment predictions from the Resolution Foundation this week both underline the sheer scale of the economic and social challenges the virus is likely to cause for many years to come. We will need unprecedented government intervention in the economy to ensure that COVID-19 does not leave millions of people unemployed, homeless or in poverty. The Mayor will be working closely with the Government, business leaders, trade unions, local authorities and other Metro

Mayors across the UK to develop a plan for London's economic recovery to protect jobs, livelihoods and living standards over the coming months and years.

- The Mayor established the Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG) which continues to manage the London-wide response to the crisis, working in partnership with the Government, NHS, local authorities and other public services. The Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience, Fiona Twycross, represents the Mayor at the Strategic Co-ordinating Centre. The SCG is working through a wide range of practical issues, from securing the provision of PPE within the capital to work around mortuary capacity. If you would like more information about the work of the SCG please contact Ffion.Meagher@london.gov.uk.
- Sadiq remains in regular contact with key London stakeholders, including business leaders, trade unions, the voluntary sector, faith groups and others, to develop our understanding of what additional support Londoners need through this crisis.

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Topical issues

Emergency response

The Mayor established a **Strategic Coordinating Group (SCG)** to manage London's immediate response to the pandemic. He asked John Barradell, the Chief Executive of the City of London Cooperation to chair the SCG, and his Deputy Mayor for Fire and Resilience, Fiona Twycross, to act as his representative on the group.

The SCG has a physical base at London's temporary Strategic Coordinating Centre, with daily calls and meetings to manage the varied elements of the emergency response.

The key issues the SCG is addressing are changing frequently as the situation develops. The current strategic focus is on social care, Personal Protective Equipment, mortality management and the impact on businesses. Other issues being managed include NHS surge capacity, shielding, volunteering, testing and food poverty.

Inequalities

Evidence is emerging of how black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities are being disproportionately affected by the coronavirus. Sadiq wrote an op-ed for The Guardian calling on the Government to collect and publish the data on the demographics of everyone impacted by the coronavirus so that we can understand and address this injustice. You can read the piece [here](#).

Economic analysis outlined by the Office of Budget Responsibility

Last week, the Office of Budget Responsibility predicted that the UK's GDP could potentially fall by 35 per cent and unemployment may rise by 2 million (to 10 per cent) as a result of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

The Mayor has been clear that our first priority must be to save lives, but that we will need to see many long-term economic interventions from the Government on an unprecedented scale – not only to protect people's jobs and livelihoods, but to re-skill and help find new employment for all those who have been forced out of work.

Brexit

Responding to the news that the Government won't seek a Brexit extension, the Mayor said on April 16:

"Most Londoners will be deeply disappointed that at a time of crisis, the Government is putting dogma ahead of the national interest. No one anticipated when voting for Brexit that the key negotiations would fall at a time when all governments are rightly focused on fighting a global pandemic.

“The last thing the country needs as it tries to find a way back from the devastation wreaked by Coronavirus is more chaos and uncertainty. I urge the Government to put political ideology aside, and pursue the pragmatic route of seeking an extension to the negotiations so that we and our European partners can focus on recovery from Covid-19.”

City Hall Action

Health

It's right that the UK's social distancing measures will be in place until the end of the month at least, probably longer. It remains essential that all Londoners continue to stay at home unless absolutely necessary so that we can protect our NHS and save lives.

The Chief Medical Officer has said that we could have reached the peak of the virus. But if we don't continue to follow the rules, we could see the number of deaths each day rise again and unprecedented demand on our heroic NHS staff. A second wave of COVID-19 could happen very easily if we lift the lockdown too soon.

Face coverings - Last week, the Mayor wrote to the Transport Secretary, Grant Shapps, asking him to urgently update the Government's advice to make the wearing of non-medical face covering obligatory when using public transport.

Non-medical face coverings are different from PPE, such as surgical masks and visors, which should be reserved for medical and care workers. Face coverings don't necessarily protect people from getting COVID-19, but if everyone wears a face mask it could help slow the spread of the virus and keep key workers safe, including transport workers. This would be consistent with the latest advice from the World Health Organization (WHO) and public health experts in London.

The Mayor has repeatedly asked the Government - for well over a week - about changing the guidance on face coverings. We can't wait any longer to catch up with the rest of the world - ministers need to act now.

At the latest COBRA meeting last week, Sadiq made clear that it's essential that the Government is prepared with a fully comprehensive exit strategy, which includes updated guidance and resources around face coverings, enhanced protective clothing and any equipment required to minimise the risk of a second wave of infections. We must avoid a repeat of the failures we have already seen in relation to PPE, high-quality ventilators and testing.

Transport

Middle-door boarding on London buses - From Monday of this week, TfL rolled out middle-door only boarding following a successful trial. Routes with single door buses will continue to operate as normal for the time being while we look at additional measures to keep drivers safe. This will provide better protection for drivers and enable social distancing. The Mayor will continue to do whatever it takes to keep our heroic transport workers and all Londoners as safe as possible.

The pilot took place on nine routes, including two that serve Guy's and St Thomas' Hospitals. As passenger numbers have reduced by about 85 per cent, there were no significant crowding issues caused by Londoners using the same door to enter and exit. This means TfL and the Mayor are confident in rolling out middle-door only boarding more widely on London's buses following requests from drivers and trade unions. This will run until further notice. Customers will not be required to tap in.

TfL will continue to make improvements to ensure there are even higher levels of protection for hard-working staff. TfL will continue to listen to the views of bus drivers and trade unions, and learn from the actions taken in other cities around the world.

Arrangements for bus drivers in vulnerable categories - Concerns have been raised with TfL about vulnerable employees – those with underlying conditions which do not require them to shield in accordance with Public Health England guidance, but who nonetheless are at higher risk from coronavirus. TfL is committed to doing the right thing by their employees so is not asking people in this category to come to work and is instead giving them special leave with pay.

TfL is also funding enhanced sick pay for bus staff who are sick or who have to self-isolate. This is to ensure they don't feel forced to attend work for financial reasons when they shouldn't, whilst ensuring there are sufficient drivers to maintain the service for critical workers.

London's Transport Commissioner, Mike Brown, has written to bus operators urging them to adopt a similar policy to TfL and not require these vulnerable employees to attend work.

Cycling support for key workers – The walking and cycling charity, Sustrans, with support from the Bicycle Association, has produced an online map to make cycling easier for key workers as they travel to and from work each day. The map will help key workers find stores that offer deals on bicycles and equipment as well as bike repair and maintenance services in their local area.

Welcoming the announcement, Will Norman, London's Walking and Cycling Commissioner, reminded Londoners that City Hall is working with CycleHoop to install more cycle parking at hospitals and with bike shop Fully Charged to provide free bikes to NHS workers. NHS, care and police staff can also access free Santander bike hire. Please help promote the Sustrans map, which can be found [here](#).

The Met Police & LFB

Recent enforcement figures published by the National Police Chief's Council show that the Met Police is maintaining a good balance between engaging, educating and encouraging members of the public who aren't observing social distancing and using their new powers to issue fines as a last resort.

Sadiq and his team remain in close contact with London's police and fire commissioners and continue to work closely with partners, including Local Councils, community groups and charities, to ensure key services are offering frontline support during this crisis, particularly in areas such as domestic abuse, victim support and youth violence.

Violence Against Women and Girls - Domestic abuse services are under significant pressure. The Mayor continues to lobby the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary to coordinate a cross-government response to domestic abuse and to provide emergency funding for support services.

While the Home Secretary has announced some limited additional support, the Government must go further. It's still not clear, for example, if any of the Chancellor's £750 million charity funding is earmarked for domestic abuse services.

Work at City Hall is underway to assess the demand for emergency refuge space and to locate empty accommodation that can be used. Sadiq has also contributed £1m to the London Community Response Fund to create an 'easy to access' process for organisations across the capital to receive emergency financial support.

Firefighter deliver PPE to health workers - Firefighters in London are helping in the fight against COVID-19 by delivering over two million pieces of PPE to frontline health workers. The London Fire Brigade have transformed a former Brigade Distribution Centre in Croydon into the Operation Seacole distribution hub, which is delivering masks, gloves and eye protection to 33 local authority centres.

Support for rough sleepers, housing tenants and owners

Cladding - COVID-19 has changed many things, but not the urgent need to protect families by removing dangerous cladding from London's homes. Last week, the Mayor, along with the M9 – the group of directly-elected regional Mayors in England - signed the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government commitment to carry on essential cladding remediation work to make buildings as safe as possible.

Support for rough sleepers – As of Sunday night (19 April) 1,044 rough sleepers were safely accommodated in hotels in London to enable them to follow the Government's guidance regarding self-isolation.

The Mayor's team is working closely with partners in local authorities, the Government and others on what should happen next to those rough sleepers currently staying in emergency accommodation. Sadiq hopes to be in a position to

apply his 'In For Good' principles, meaning that no one will be asked to leave until an offer of further support is in place.

Sadiq has welcomed the Government's measures for three-month mortgage repayment holidays, a ban on evictions and rent flexibility, but he's written to Ministers requesting they also ensure that:

- mortgage holidays are passed on to tenants;
- renters are protected by a 'triple lock', which would ensure the welfare benefits system is set up to cover, in full, the rents of private tenants unable to pay then due to COVID-19, prevent landlords from issuing Section 8 (rent arrears) eviction notices during the crisis and scrap Section 21 (no fault) evictions altogether;
- the Bedroom Tax is suspended; and
- the Mayor is given flexibility in allocated funding from the Affordable Homes Programme in order to best support the sector at this time.

In the medium and long term, the impact on the housing, development and construction sectors cannot be understated. The Deputy Mayor for Housing, Tom Copley, is chairing a COVID-19 Housing Recovery Taskforce, focussed on ensuring that housing delivery in London can continue at pace and scale once it's safe to do so.

Business & employment

Pay it Forward London campaign – The Mayor has launched a crowdfunding scheme to support small businesses. He is urging Londoners to 'Pay it Forward' to help companies stay afloat during the necessary restrictions to fight the spread of coronavirus.

Pay It Forward London – aimed at industries including hospitality, retail and leisure – encourages Londoners to buy goods and services in advance, which will then be delivered once businesses return to normal or near-normal operation. The aim is to provide a vital lifeline to businesses struggling with cashflow, and is part of a wider package of help the Mayor is offering to small businesses, including the London Growth Hub which is delivering tailored one-to-one advice to SMEs.

You can access Pay if Forward London [here](#).

Additional £1m investment for business support – The Mayor called a meeting of the LEAP Board, which was chaired by London's Deputy Mayor for Business, to discuss options for immediate additional support for London's business. With the LEAP Board's agreement, the Mayor has committed to investing an additional £1 million into extending business support over the coming 12 months to help companies through the current crisis.

Support for vulnerable Londoners, the Voluntary and Community Sector and Charities

Working to ensure the benefits system provides sufficient support throughout the crisis - Last week, Sadiq wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Therese Coffey, urging the Government to adopt changes to the welfare system. The changes would help the welfare system cope with the huge increase in demand and support those most in need. In his letter, the Mayor:

- Called for the suspension of no recourse to public funds conditions and for the Government to offer non-repayable advances to all new Universal Credit claimants.
- Called for those already receiving support through legacy benefits not to be moved to Universal Credit in order to increase the capacity of the DWP to process the sharp rise in benefit claims.
- Highlighted the need to ensure that benefits payments cover the basic costs of living.
- Expressed concern that unnecessary benefit deductions are harming the most vulnerable in society.

Centre for London round table on vulnerable citizens – Deputy Mayor Debbie Weekes-Bernard has spoken at a virtual roundtable event hosted by Centre for London, which looked at the impact of the virus on London, its most vulnerable citizens, public services, the impact on the economy and civil society. Debbie focussed on the way the virus and the resulting lockdown is exacerbating existing inequalities and the Mayor's work to support communities in response.

Environment

Air Quality – The GLA have advised boroughs that the maintenance of air quality monitoring equipment should be included in the list of essential activities to be continued through the lockdown period. The data collected through the air quality monitoring network is considered extremely important to the ongoing evaluation of risk during the coronavirus outbreak due to the potential impact of air pollution on respiratory illnesses. A letter granting authorisation for workers to conduct essential maintenance on air quality monitoring equipment across London is being provided.

Parks and green spaces – The majority of London's parks and open spaces remain open to allow people to exercise once a day. Those that have been temporarily closed (notably Brockwell Park in Lambeth, and Victoria Park in Tower Hamlets) have now reopened. Most users are behaving responsibly, maintaining social distancing. However, a minority of users are still not using these spaces for informal exercise, as a route to work, or are failing to maintain social distancing. Park managers continue to manage the situation locally (with the resources they have available) working with the Met, where appropriate. This appears to be working effectively with no significant incidents reported.

The GLA continues to work with boroughs, other park managers and MOPAC to ensure consistency on borough closures and the approaches being taken to manage these spaces. Guidance on using parks and green spaces has been prepared with

these organisations to ensure the core messages are communicated as widely as possible. This is available on the GLA website and is updated as required

Waste – Increased incidents of fly-tipping have been reported in several national news bulletins. However, London boroughs have not reported any unusual spikes in fly-tipping. The usual waste collection and recycling services are largely being maintained and only 6 boroughs have suspended garden and or bulky waste services. We are engaging with London Councils on this issue and, through LWARB, have encouraged people not to fly tip any waste as this will put further strain on services and could impact the health of others.

The GLA and LWARB maintain the position that Household Waste Recycling Centres should remain closed until the Government has relaxed their guidance on social distancing due the close-proximity nature of fully-functioning HWRCs.

On the week of 14 April, the Chartered Institute of Waste Management (CIWEM) , together with LWARB and other partners, launched a national waste brokerage service platform for local authorities to connect with commercial waste collection companies who have seen a fall-off in trade to help shore up local capacity. No London boroughs have had to use this platform as yet.

Skills and Education

Skills - The GLA is supporting the adult skills sector in London through the current period of COVID-19 closures. Deputy Mayor Jules Pipe met college principals on 2 April having written to all London's skills providers on 31 March, confirming measures the GLA will take to provide them with funding stability, some of which go further than the Government's offer to providers outside London. The GLA's commitments have been well-received by the sector. We also continue to encourage providers to offer whatever provision they can online, including co-funding the Keep London Learning online portal, to enable some continuity for London learners.

Youth services - We continue to provide support for youth organisations that are helping vulnerable Londoners.

International Cooperation

International lessons on face coverings - COVID-19 is a truly global crisis, and the Mayor has been speaking regularly to Mayors and other colleagues from around the world about how London and other cities are fighting this virus and what is working elsewhere.

It has become clear that a key part of the approach to suppressing the virus in other cities around the world has been to ask the public to wear non-medical face coverings. In many ways, the UK Government's guidance is behind the curve on this. The Mayors of Los Angeles and New York have asked all residents to wear non-medical face coverings - such as a scarf or bandana - when making essential trips. Germany is now advising people to wear face coverings on public transport as their lockdown begins to loosen. And South Korea, Taiwan and Hong Kong (who all dealt with SARS) advised face coverings from the outset, and currently have far fewer confirmed cases and fatalities.

The latest WHO position is that, while face coverings do not necessarily protect you from getting the virus, they do reduce the chances of you giving it to others. This is especially important given multiple studies show that COVID-19 can be spread by individuals who are pre-symptomatic or asymptomatic.

In London, we face particular challenges, similar to some of other major cities – such as our city’s high density and key workers being in close proximity to other people on our public transport network.

C40 COVID-19 Economic Recovery Global Taskforce – Last week, Sadiq took part in a C40 conference call with Mayors of other major cities to discuss plans for a C40 COVID-19 Economic Recovery Global Taskforce. This was the second C40 conference call that Sadiq has joined, which are an opportunity to update other cities on what we are doing in London, and to hear first-hand about the responses Mayors are taking in their own cities.

Media, social media

- Sadiq did an interview with Glamour Magazine on the impact of the lockdown on mental health, domestic violence and community support throughout the coronavirus crisis. You can watch the highlights [here](#).
- Sadiq posted his latest #LondonTogether video on Friday, which is about mental health. You can watch the video [here](#).
- Sadiq wrote for the Guardian about how (BAME) communities are being disproportionately affected by the coronavirus and the action that the Government needs to take to address this injustice. You can read it here: [More BAME people are dying from coronavirus. We have to know why](#)
- Sadiq took part in a media round on 17 Friday. He spoke to the [Today Programme](#), [LBC](#), [Sky News](#) and GMB about his call for the Government to update its advice to encourage people to wear non-medical face coverings in places where it isn’t possible to social distance.

What you can do to help

City Hall is working hard to develop and establish new structures to support Londoners and to improve the city's resilience at this difficult time. You can help by promoting these services:

- **How to cope with bereavement and grief during the coronavirus outbreak** - Support is available for those who have not been able to say goodbye to loved ones they've lost to Covid-19. Find the GLA's list of charities, helplines and online advice [here](#).
- **Pay it Forward London** – Londoners can buy goods and services in advance from small businesses to help them stay afloat via the new Pay it Forward London page [here](#). Please point Londoners to the page to help the thousands of small businesses at risk of collapse due to a lack of cashflow.
- **Volunteering** - There is a real need for volunteers in London at a local level, particularly around food banks. Please do encourage constituents to visit [the GLA Coronavirus volunteering portal](#).
The portal will connect people with:
 - Their local volunteer centre or CVS
 - Their local authority who will also be coordinating offers of help from volunteers
 - And local COVID-19 mutual aid groups
- **Employment Rights Hub** - Many people are concerned about the financial impact of self-isolating or taking time off work. The Mayor's Employment Rights Hub has the latest information about what people are entitled to. **You can access, and point those who may be concerned, to the Hub [here](#).**
- **Free advice from the Good Growth Hub** - The COVID-19 page on the **Growth Hub** website has been updated with more guidance and information. There are multiple factsheets and guides on **the Hub which can be accessed [here](#).**
- **Information on COVID-19 for non-UK nationals** - City Hall's EU Londoners Hub has specific information for non-UK nationals on how they can access to healthcare, visas, the EU settlement scheme and employment rights and how they are affected by the crisis. **The Information on COVID-19 for non-UK nationals page can be accessed [here](#).**