

MAYOR OF LONDON

Caroline Russell AM

Chair of the London Assembly Health Committee

C/o Lauren.Harvey@london.gov.uk

Our ref: MGLA200821-1130

Date: 26 October 2021

Dear Caroline,

Thank you very much for your letter of 19 August on behalf of the London Assembly Health Committee, outlining the Committee's recommendations in relation to public health messaging around COVID-19 and my role in this as Mayor. I am sorry for the delay in responding.

I welcome the work that your Committee has done in this area. I would like to reassure the Committee of my commitment to doing everything within my power to ensure that the health and wellbeing of Londoners is protected as we continue to adapt to the presented challenges.

I have set out my response against each of the recommendations made in your letter below.

The recommendations asked for me to inform the Committee of:

The actions that the Mayor and TfL are taking on an ongoing basis to reinforce messaging around the wearing of face coverings (including in the media, on social media and on the transport network)

The national face covering regulations were revoked on 19 July 2021, though it remains a requirement under Transport for London's (TfL) conditions of carriage for customers to wear face coverings on the TfL network and in stations. I called for this measure in order to give Londoners and visitors the reassurance and confidence to make the most of what our city has to offer, while also protecting our transport workers and those who may be vulnerable and rely on the network to get around our city.

The requirement to wear face coverings has been supported by extensive customer information messages, including posters and PA announcements across the TfL network. A radio marketing campaign has reached over six million Londoners, and over 10,000 posters have been used across the network. Reminders of the requirement to wear face coverings are included in regular customer emails sent to a database of over two million people, in press releases, on TfL's website, and in regular social media posts. Reminders will continue to feature in TfL marketing campaigns where relevant, as well as on radio, in-station and outdoor posters for the foreseeable future.

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I will continue to support TfL's messages on face coverings across my channels, including on my social media channels and in press interviews.

The actions TfL is taking to ensure compliance with the compulsory wearing of face coverings on the TfL network

Up to 19 July, the national face covering regulations enabled the British Transport Police and authorised TfL officers to issue fixed penalty notices to customers failing to wear face coverings in accordance with the regulations.

Issuing fixed penalty notices is no longer possible now that the regulations have ended and the requirement for face coverings applies under TfL's conditions of carriage. TfL enforcement officers deal with those people not complying with conditions of carriage through a combination of education, engagement and enforcement. Since the expiry of national regulations, TfL enforcement officers have continued to prevent people from boarding services or directed them to leave stations due to non-compliance.

Since national regulations ended, customer compliance has remained high in general and particularly during peak travel times, with customer research showing that 86 per cent of customers say they are wearing a face covering at all times while using TfL services. Of those not wearing a face covering, more than half claim to have an exemption or valid reason for not complying.

Evidence of joint working with the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to agree consistent shared messages about the use of face coverings on all (not just TfL) public transport in London

Over the last 18 months, TfL officers have regularly engaged with officials from the Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Transport on a range of matters, including the use of face coverings on public transport. I have not spoken directly with the Health Secretary about this issue. However, I have repeatedly made the case to the Transport Secretary, who has the powers to mandate the use of face coverings on public transport, that the Government should reintroduce national regulations requiring face coverings to be worn.

In-depth TfL customer research in May 2021 indicated that face coverings were the most important factor in encouraging customers back to all forms of public transport. This also highlighted that face coverings were amongst the top five drivers of satisfaction for current users across all modes of transport. The majority of disabled and Clinically Extremely Vulnerable customers support the requirement for face coverings to be worn on the network (unless exempt) to help reduce the risk of transmission. This is a material factor in disabled customers' confidence in travelling on the network.

The Committee also recommended that I should take responsibility for communicating on an ongoing basis the self-isolation support measures that are available for Londoners

Supporting people to self-isolate when they have COVID-19 is a vital tool in protecting London from the further spread of coronavirus. This is especially important as we move through autumn into winter. From early on in the pandemic, I have called on the Government to ensure that proper support is in place for those who need to self-isolate, either because they have COVID-19 or have been a close contact. No one should have to choose between their health, the health of their community, and putting food on the table or supporting their family.

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Local Authorities administer the self-isolation support scheme, and the exact nature of the wider support that is wrapped around the scheme varies from area to area. This might be dependent on their own, or local voluntary sector, capacity or may be about meeting the hyperlocal needs of specific communities. The scheme also has some very strict eligibility criteria. For all these reasons pan-London messaging about the scheme on my own channels remains a challenge, and we have therefore focused on signposting Londoners to their boroughs for further information about how to access the scheme and to understand what is on offer.

Your letter also asked for the Mayor's support for the Health Committee's recommendations to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care following the 22 June meeting, as outlined in the Appendix to your letter.

I am happy to give my broad support to the Committee's letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care. I have set out my specific comments on some of the recommendations below.

On Recommendation 4 of your letter, it may be helpful to note an update to Government guidance published on 25 August 2021, which stated that for children in Year 7 or above:

'Nationwide, while the government is not recommending face coverings are necessary, schools will have the discretion to require face coverings in communal areas if they believe that is right in their particular circumstances. In addition, and consistent with WHO's new advice, the government will advise additional measures are taken in areas where the transmission of the virus is high. This revised approach will also apply to further education colleges and will be reflected in guidance to universities, but not to children in primary schools where the risks to children are lower.'

The update also states that if the rate of transmission increases across the whole country, stricter guidance on face coverings may be re-introduced nationally. Given these changes, Recommendation 5 may no longer be necessary.

On Recommendation 6, it is important that schools have the support they need to test pupils and implement preventative measures. I welcome the Government's planned measures to monitor and improve ventilation, but I am disappointed that steps were not taken sooner to implement this over the summer, ready for the new term. Further resources are immediately needed for structural improvements to ventilation. I will be calling on the Government to maintain rigid surveillance, not only on the immediate health issues arising from return to school but also of health inequalities and any disproportionate impacts that arise. If we see case rates and hospitalisations escalating, they must act quickly to support schools to enforce early control measures, like the reintroduction of face coverings, to prevent another lockdown this winter.

On Recommendation 8, I have been clear in my communications with the Government that the most effective way of getting passengers to wear face coverings on public transport is one clear, simple, enforceable rule that applies across the nation's public transport system. This can only be achieved by the Government reintroducing the national face covering regulations and moving away from its messaging of 'expecting and recommending' face coverings to be worn on public transport. I will continue to take advice from the relevant medical experts and would welcome Ministers reintroducing regulations mandating this requirement, along with complementary messaging that would align with that currently being shared in London, across the country as a whole. A number of other transport operators who provide services in London continue to actively encourage their customers to wear face coverings.

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Thank you again for writing and raising these issues, and for the work you and the Committee do.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sadiq Khan', with a small '2' written below the 'h'.

Sadiq Khan
Mayor of London