



Caroline Russell AM

Chair of the Health Committee

Sadiq Khan

Mayor of London

Sent by email

19 August 2021

Dear Sadiq,

I am writing to you on behalf of the London Assembly Health Committee with recommendations relating to your ongoing public health messaging role, in the context of the lifting of almost all measures to mitigate transmission of COVID-19. On 22 June 2021 the Committee investigated how London needs to respond and adapt to COVID-19 threats whilst reopening and entering a 'new normal'. We heard from a range of expert witnesses¹ who provided evidence and insights on the specific vulnerabilities of London to existing and new variants. The lifting of restrictions on 19 July has left us at a critical juncture in our response to the pandemic, and we are therefore seeking reassurance that you will do all you can to help provide adequate protection and safeguards for the health and wellbeing of Londoners.

We lay out our recommendations to you below. Please also see our [recent letter to the Rt Hon Sajid Javid](#), Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, for our position on a number of issues; we would welcome your support for our recommendations to the Secretary of State (listed in Appendix 1).

¹ John Hetherington (Head of London Resilience), Vicky Hobart (Head of Health, Greater London Authority), Dr Sandra Husbands (Director of Public Health for Hackney and the City of London), Dr Zubaida Haque (Independent SAGE), Professor Anthony Costello (Independent SAGE).

Face coverings on public transport

We heard that clear and consistent public health information and engagement is critical. This includes continuous messaging around the wearing of face coverings and other mitigation measures such as socialising outdoors. The Committee notes and welcomes that you have asked TfL to maintain the use of face coverings on its services as a condition of carriage, and further notes that the Transport Secretary, The Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, has welcomed this decision as 'wanted and expected'. We are of the view that sustained messaging and management of compliance will be vital to the success of this decision.

The Committee recommends that the Mayor 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 actions TfL are taking to ensure compliance with the compulsory wearing of face coverings on the TfL network; and**
- **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.**

Support for self-isolation

We heard about the need for effective, timely and personalised support, including financial support, to enable people to self-isolate if they have tested positive for COVID-19 or are identified as a contact of someone who has tested positive. The Committee heard that low levels of awareness of the support available was a key barrier, noting this was particularly the case for ethnic minority groups. Dr Sandra Husbands said: *"the short answer is most people do not know that there is any support in place"*.

The recent 'pingdemic' has highlighted how pivotal well-supported isolation will be in our continued fight against COVID-19 as restrictions lift. Although contact isolation rules were amended on 16 August for those who are double-vaccinated, it remains likely that significant numbers of Londoners will be required to isolate – either through testing positive, or being contact-traced and not double-vaccinated – for some time. Furthermore, any future variant which exhibits greater levels of vaccine escape could increase numbers of isolating Londoners.

The Committee recommends that the Mayor should take responsibility for communicating on an ongoing basis the self-isolation support measures that are available for Londoners.

Given the urgency of this situation and the ongoing threat to the health and wellbeing of Londoners, I would welcome a response to the above evidence and recommendations by 10 September 2021.

Yours sincerely,



Caroline Russell AM

Chair of the Health Committee

Following our 22 June meeting, the Health Committee recommends:

- 1) The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care should reassure the Committee that sufficient planning, preparation and supply of flu vaccines and COVID-19 booster jabs will be readily available for Londoners when required, given the possible rise in other respiratory viruses such as flu, potential new variants, and reduction in vaccine protection due to waning immunity in autumn and winter.**
- 2) It is crucial that government messaging about opening up on 19 July supports the continued push to get Londoners double vaccinated as soon as possible and explains clearly how people can protect themselves and others by retaining mitigating habits such as wearing masks in crowded indoor situations and washing hands frequently.**
- 3) To enable evidence-based policy making, the Department for Health and Social Care should request that Public Health England release the data on the infection and transmission rates of the Delta variant in schools, and on an ongoing basis should ensure that data on schools transmission of any new variants of concern is released.**
- 4) As face coverings are no longer compulsory in schools, the Committee requests further details to understand under what conditions face coverings would be reintroduced.**
- 5) Greater discretionary powers should be considered for Directors of Public Health, so that they can be as responsive as possible in advising schools to re-introduce face coverings in their borough when necessary.**
- 6) The Department of Health and Social Care should utilise the summer holiday period to work with the Department for Education and consider the necessary mitigation measures that should be applied when schools return in September. These precautionary measures should include improved guidance and support to improve ventilation and air filtration in schools.**
- 7) The Department for Health and Social Care should release the data that has driven the decision to make the use of face coverings on public transport a matter of personal responsibility rather than compulsory, and state at what threshold of cases face coverings would be mandated again.**
- 8) The Department for Health and Social Care should work with the Mayor of London to agree consistent shared messages about the use of face coverings on all public transport in London.**
- 9) Data and best practice from the Government’s ongoing self-isolation pilots should be widely disseminated and then integrated into the self-isolation support scheme as soon as possible, particularly to help people living in overcrowded conditions and on low incomes.**
- 10) The threshold of eligibility for the current financial support packages for self-isolation should be reviewed.**