

# COVID-19 UPDATE FROM GARETH THOMAS MP

Dear Friend,

The virus is spreading rapidly across the city again, with Harrow now in the top five London boroughs for new cases. From midnight tonight, London will be moving into **Tier 2 - Alert Level High**

☑ All businesses and venues can continue to operate, in a Covid-secure manner, other than those that remain closed in law, such as nightclubs and adult entertainment venues

🍷 Certain businesses selling food or drink on their premises are required to close between **10pm and 5am**. Businesses and venues selling food for consumption off the premises can continue to do so after 10pm as long as this is through a delivery service, click-and-collect or drive-thru

📖 Schools, universities and places of worship remain open

🏠 Weddings and funerals can go ahead with restrictions on the number of attendees

🏋️ Organised indoor sport and exercise classes can continue to take place, provided the Rule of Six is followed

6 The “[Rule of Six](#)” will continue to apply outdoors and in private gardens

🏠 People must not meet with anybody outside their household or support bubble in any indoor setting, whether at home or in a public place

🚲 People should aim to reduce the number of journeys they make where possible. If they need to travel, they should walk or cycle where possible, or to plan ahead and avoid busy times and routes on public transport

Personally, whilst I support the move to Tier 2, it's clear that we are at this stage because the Government has not yet created an effective track and trace system. It's no coincidence we're seeing cases rise and restrictions return at the same time [we're seeing the worst ever contact tracing rate](#). I believe there will be more business closures, higher job losses and greater hardship if further support isn't announced urgently. **Ministers could do more to support London businesses and businesses undergoing Tier 2 level restrictions across the country, but so far, they seem determined not to.**

In the past week, Harrow had **123** cases per 100,000 people, 6.1% of all tested in Harrow are testing positive, while the average area in England had 93 cases. My thoughts continue to be with the loved ones of those who have sadly died, and with those who have contracted the virus. I can only begin to imagine the sense of fear and loss the families must be feeling. As a community, we are immensely grateful to all of our NHS staff, social care workers and all of our key workers. I hope readers continue to stay safe, socially distance and regularly check in on loved ones.

The response to Coronavirus is being directed by Government centrally working with Public Health England, the Government's advice is [available here](#). Government assistance specifically for businesses [is available here](#).

As always, if you need to get in touch about the issues covered here – or anything else – please contact my office on **0207 219 4243** or e-mail me at [gareth.thomas.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:gareth.thomas.mp@parliament.uk). Please bear with us, as

we have received over 5 times our usual weekly amount of correspondence. My team and I are working hard to respond as promptly as possible. Although we have had to cancel face to face surgery appointments, we are now scheduling regular Zoom surgeries and phone calls with Harrow West constituents.

## Harrow Council



The council has a webpage covering their own response to the coronavirus pandemic, [this is regularly being updated and is available here.](#)

## Message from Council Leader Graham Henson following COVID restrictions:

### **Immediate action required as London moves to High level Covid alert**

Cases of covid continue to rise rapidly across London, as well as in Harrow where they have nearly doubled in the past couple of weeks. Because of this **London will move to tier 2 lockdown tomorrow.**

I understand this is a difficult and worrying time for our communities, residents and businesses but these new restrictions are essential to keep Harrow safe. If we are to slow the spread of this deadly virus we must all take action now.

The move to tier 2 **now means more restrictions around social distancing** in London and Harrow to control the spread and save lives:

- **We must not meet socially with friends and family indoors** in any setting unless we live with them or have formed a support bubble with them. This includes private homes, and any other indoor venues such as pubs and restaurants.

The **new restrictions come into place from midnight tomorrow (Friday 16 October) across the whole of London** - however I urge you all to start following the guidance now.

The following also remain in place:

- **Nurseries, schools, colleges and universities will stay open.**

- **Work from home, if you can.** If you cannot work from home, you should continue to attend your place of work. Only use public transport when necessary and walk or cycle where you can.
- **Pubs, bars and restaurants continue to close at 10pm** and operate table-service only, except for takeaways.
- **Informal childcare arrangements may continue.**

It is essential that we all follow the hands, face, space mantra:

- **Wash your hands**, or use hand sanitiser, regularly and for at least 20 seconds
- **Cover your face**, when using public transport or in busy spaces like high streets or shops where it may be more difficult to keep your distance
- **Keep a safe distance** from anyone not in your household or support bubble.

If you develop symptoms of the virus, please immediately self-isolate – people who fail to self-isolate will face a fine of up to £10,000.

If you have one of the three symptoms [book a free test online](#) or call 119.

## You can now get tested at a local testing centre:

- South Harrow walk-through testing centre at Brigade Close Car Park, HA2 0LQ (opposite South Harrow Police Station) - open daily 8am to 8pm. No parking available at this site.
- Edgware testing centre at Watling Community Centre, Orange Hill Road, HA8 0TR - open daily 8am to 8pm.
- Mobile testing site (cars only) on selected days, 10.30am to 3.30pm at Harrow Civic Centre and Northwick Park Hospital.

**Tests must be booked in advance. Only book a test if you have symptoms.**

As the Council we stand together with the rest of London in the fight against Covid-19 - I am working with London Council Leaders, the Mayor of London and the Government to balance the public health, economic and social impacts of this virus. London Councils and the Mayor are asking the Government for economic support for London's businesses to ensure they survive this pandemic.

If you are struggling financially or with your well-being, [support is available](#).

None of us want to stop seeing our family and friends, but by following the Public Health rules, helping each other and working together we can get through this, just as we did during the lockdown earlier this year. We must all play our part to avoid further restrictions and keep Harrow safe.

Please stay safe and take all necessary precautions to do so.

**Graham Henson, Leader of Harrow Council**



## MAYOR OF LONDON

"It is clear that the virus is now spreading rapidly in every part of our city, and hospital and ICU admissions are steadily rising. Time and again it has been shown that it is better to act earlier than to act too late – which would cost more lives and damage more livelihoods. I am not willing to put Londoners' lives at risk and we must do all we can to minimise economic damage.

"That is why, following discussions between me, ministers and our city's senior health advisers and council leaders, the Government will move London into tier 2 restrictions - alert level high – from the start of Saturday. This will mean Londoners will not be able to mix between different households indoors - which includes in their homes and inside pubs and restaurants. Londoners should also aim to reduce the number of journeys they make where possible.

"There are no good options. I know these further restrictions will require Londoners to make yet more sacrifices, but the disastrous failure of the test, trace and isolate system leaves us with little choice. I am well aware that these restrictions will have a further significant impact on businesses in our city, which is why the Government must come forward with more financial support for affected businesses and local authorities immediately, as well as for vulnerable Londoners struggling to get by.

"I still believe that, as SAGE recommended to ministers, the immediate priority should now also be a short national circuit breaker. This would allow us to get the reinfection rate down to a manageable level and give the Government more time finally to get a grip on the failing test and trace system.

"But moving London to the next tier of restrictions from Saturday will, we hope, help slow the spread of the virus, take pressure off the NHS and help avert the possibility of a full lockdown lasting months – which would be the worst possible outcome for Londoners and our economy."

Working with the Mayor, Sadiq Khan, I am joining many London-wide MPs and council leaders to apply pressure on the Prime Minister for a comprehensive package of financial support. The asks include:

- Businesses in retail, hospitality, leisure and cultural now require an urgent package of direct financial aid that can guarantee their survival until the restrictions come to an end.
- We need to see a much bigger and more expansive job protection scheme. The re-launched furlough scheme should be 80 per cent of wages as it was originally, and applied nationally, not *just* for businesses legally forced to close in tier 3.
- We need more support for self employed people reliant on sectors such as our creative industries. As part of the Chancellor's announcement, the Government will cover only 20 per cent of average monthly trading profits.
- The Test and Trace Support Payment (TTSP) must be enough to support Londoners to follow public health advice and keep their community safe and should be more widely available. We

remain concerned about Low Income Londoners who are not eligible for support either from this payment or Statutory Sick Pay (SSP).

- Local authorities should have increased resource to provide discretionary support and the weekly Statutory Sick Pay rate should be increased to the equivalent of the London Living Wage. The lower earnings threshold should also be removed to ensure that low-paid workers who are ineligible for benefits have the support they need to self-isolate.

### Support for children and young people

Harrow Council, Harrow CCG, and Young Harrow Foundation have [put together a joint document](#) signposting residents to a collection of some of the most helpful and trusted sources of information and guidance for children and young people's wellbeing.

For young people (high school and college age), the document **'looking after ourselves'** can be found [here](#) – covering how to stay healthy, stay connected and learn new skills during this time.

### Counselling services and mental health support

- [Relate Family Mediation](#) - a service fully geared up to supporting families through the crisis. Tel: 0300 0032324 or email [info.LNWH@relate.org.uk](mailto:info.LNWH@relate.org.uk).
- [DAWN](#) - provide a counselling service to the local community of Harrow and its neighbouring boroughs. Tel: 020 8427 6796 or email: [yakeendawn@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:yakeendawn@yahoo.co.uk)
- [Need To Talk](#) - offering 1 to 1 counselling supporting their clients or any client by telephone or webcam. Tel: call/ text on 07427548559 or email [info@needtotalk.london](mailto:info@needtotalk.london)
- [Ignite Trust](#) - During these challenging and uncertain times, Ignite Trust is working hard to ensure they continue to provide support to the boroughs most vulnerable and at-risk young people. Email [office@ignitetrust.org.uk](mailto:office@ignitetrust.org.uk).
- [Every Mind Matters](#) - Expert advice and practical tips to help you look after your mental health and wellbeing.

### Coronavirus Hotline

The council continues to operate a hotline telephone number during weekends in order to provide support to those in need of assistance in Harrow - if you are in need of support due to Covid please give the hotline a call - **0208 901 2698**

HM Government

NHS

LOCAL COVID  
ALERT LEVEL

**HIGH**

**YOU MUST:**

- ▶ Not meet people socially anywhere indoors
- ▶ Only meet people outdoors in groups of up to six
- ▶ Work from home if possible
- ▶ Reduce the number of journeys you make

Find all local restrictions and laws at [gov.uk/coronavirus](https://gov.uk/coronavirus)

STAY ALERT • CONTROL THE VIRUS • SAVE LIVES

## Parliament



### **Emergency School Funding during COVID**

Last week, in a Westminster Hall debate, I called on the Government for an urgent funding settlement for primary and secondary schools in Harrow.

Research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research set out the scale of educational and financial challenges facing schools, based on interviews with almost 3,000 school leaders and teachers across more than 2,200 primary and secondary schools in England.

The report notes the difficulties in teaching remotely, with more than one quarter of pupils having limited or no access to IT at home—a particular challenge for schools serving the most deprived areas. Across the piece, almost 50% of teachers believed that their pupils needed intensive catch-up help, with the figure being even higher in the most deprived schools and in areas serving the highest proportion of pupils from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, such as schools in Harrow West. The report notes the need for additional IT equipment.

The NFER suggests that some primary schools could need up to an estimated £280,000 a year, and that an average secondary school could need up to an estimated £720,600 in order to operate in line with the Government's requirements.

Referencing an “excellent high school” in Harrow, the Harrow West MP explained the school was now burdened by “**£175,000** in extra costs due to COVID”, listing “extra cleaning, extra teaching cover, longer hours needed for support staff, additional essential supplies, such as personal protective equipment and sanitiser, and significant digital investment” leading to the increase. Similarly, for primary schools in Harrow, Gareth referenced “**over £60,000**” in costs just for the summer term, in additional costs for “staffing to cover lessons where teachers or teaching assistants were shielding, and for site staff and office staff overtime to prepare for the reopening of the school.”

[Read more here](#)

## Calling for extension of Holiday Hunger scheme

Earlier this week, I urged [the Prime Minister](#) and the [Secretary of State for Education](#) to follow the Welsh Government in extending the holiday hunger scheme through the Half Term and Christmas holidays. [Despite a surge in UK families applying for free school meals](#), the Prime Minister and Sec of State both fell short of a commitment to an extension of the scheme. Over the past twenty four hours, the impressive footballer and campaigner, Marcus Rashford (who forced the Government's u-turn earlier this year) has already garnered over 100,000 signatures [on his petition for ending child food poverty](#). In the coming weeks and months, I will continue to raise the moral issue of holiday hunger with Government Ministers on behalf of my constituents. But I hope this petition will be the push that's needed to support the parents of literally millions of children this Half Term and Christmas.

## Keir Starmer calls for a circuit breaker lockdown



Earlier this week, you may have heard Leader of the Opposition, Keir Starmer calling for a “circuit breaker lockdown”. According to scientific advisers to the government, thousands of deaths could be prevented up to January with a circuit breaker.

A [modelling paper](#) written by Professor Graham Medley and colleagues sets out that deaths could possibly reduce for the rest of the year from about 19,900 to 12,100. Hospital admissions could be reduced from 132,400 to 66,500. A limited lockdown, with schools and shops open but hospitality venues closed, could potentially cut deaths to about 15,600, they said. This is why Labour is calling the Government to set out how they plan to regain control of the virus, and it is clear that must include a national circuit-breaker in England to drive down transmission and protect our NHS.

A circuit-breaker is in line with evidence from SAGE and is a temporary set of clear and effective restrictions designed to bring down the R rate. It would last two-three weeks across England, and happen imminently to be timed to run across half-term to minimise disruption. Schools would otherwise be kept open.

The economic ramifications of any lockdown are significant and so Labour is also calling for a combination of wage support and reforms to the safety net that ensures no-one is pushed into poverty for keeping not only themselves but everybody safe. This means fixing the gaps in support for the self-employed and the

government must urgently stop clawing back the £1.3bn underspend from existing programmes and make this available to local authorities to support our businesses.

SAGE papers from September make clear that further measures were urgently required but the Government didn't heed this advice. The urgent need for action can no longer be ignored - we know that the quicker these interventions are put in place, the quicker they can be eased and the devastating impact on both the economy and the number of lives lost due to Covid-19 can be minimised. This is why Labour is recommending this happens to include the October school half-term, so that we act in time to slow infections and ease the burden on the NHS in time for Christmas.

### **Can you provide support?**



**London's Community Kitchen** (based at The Bridge, next to Harrow Leisure Centre) are putting Harrow on the map. At the height of the pandemic, this incredible operation served over 10,000 people across Harrow and London and they are continuing to serve over 4,000 people per week. The Community Kitchen is working with Harrow Council and many other community groups to coordinate a Harrow wide response to the Coronavirus outbreak. Please consider donating or getting involved in any way that you can: <https://www.londonscommunitykitchen.com/home-1>

If you're ever in need of their support, the Community Kitchen want to help - they won't ask you for any details, or anything in return, just turn up and they will provide you with food. If you would like to get involved with the Community Kitchen - register here: <https://www.londonscommunitykitchen.com/get-involved-1> and if you can donate anything, they will make a little go a very long way: <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/make-harrow-smile-fundraiser-2020-1>

### **Finding Support**

**Do you have a medical condition that makes you vulnerable? Please register.**

A reminder, if you think you fall into a category that makes you vulnerable to coronavirus – [register with the Government here](#). For example, you'll be able to ask for help getting deliveries of essential supplies like

food. The council has just started to receive this information and are working with local organisations to provide support to those who apply.

If you're not sure whether your medical condition makes you extremely vulnerable, register anyway. This service is free. [You can register yourself, or on behalf of someone else.](#)

## Help from me

**GARETH THOMAS MP**

I am regularly holding phone and Zoom surgeries for Harrow West constituents.

To arrange an appointment please call or email me:

**020 7219 4243**

[Gareth.thomas.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:Gareth.thomas.mp@parliament.uk)

**Gareth Thomas MP**   Gareth Thomas MP  @garethtmp  @gareththomasmp  [gareththomas.org.uk](http://gareththomas.org.uk)

I appreciate that whilst this outbreak of Covid-19 is currently dominating a lot of our thoughts, other concerns and problems do not disappear. However, to help reduce the spread of infection, I am asking members of the public who need to contact my office to do so by phone or email rather than in person and further, I will continue to hold surgery appointments exclusively by telephone and Zoom video conferencing. This is a temporary measure and a sensible precaution to protect vulnerable people. Please be assured we continue to offer a full service of advice and support to members of the public who need it.

As always, my office can be contacted on [gareth.thomas.mp@parliament.uk](mailto:gareth.thomas.mp@parliament.uk) or by telephone on **0207 219 4243** (Monday-Friday).

Best wishes,

**Gareth**