Healthwatch Liverpool Online Focus Group

COVID-19 Testing and NHS Track and Trace

15th October 2020

Introduction

On October 15th 2020, we ran an online focus group for members of the public on the topic of COVID-19 Testing and NHS Track & Trace. We were aware of national and local news stories detailing the difficulty that some people had obtaining COVID-19 tests. We were interested in finding out more about Liverpool residents' experiences and perceptions of COVID-19 testing, along with the NHS Track and Trace system.

The focus group was attended by 14 people. This total included members of the public, Healthwatch Liverpool volunteers, and Healthwatch Liverpool staff. The focus group took place on Zoom, a video conferencing application. 13 participants joined the group on a laptop, tablet, smartphone or other device, and one person telephoned in. One member of staff facilitated the discussion, and three staff and volunteers took notes of the conversation. These notes were used to produce this report.

Summary of findings

COVID-19 Testing

Three people we spoke to in the focus group had tried to get a test for COVID-19, and all three people were successfully able to get a test. Some people had been tested more than once. They accessed tests in various ways, including home testing, testing at walk-in test sites, and drive-thru testing.

One person who tried to get a test at a drive-thru site told us they were originally only able to get a test in Llandudno, North Wales, which is over one hour's drive away from Liverpool. They told us they waited to get a test in Liverpool.

One person told us they were able to get a test a walk-in testing centre, although they needed to drive to get to the centre itself. This person told us they were unsure if their whole family would be able to get tests, as they could only book tests for four people. On the day, staff allowed the whole family to get tested.

People who said they had been tested said the testing process itself was relatively straightforward and simple. Some people were unsure about whether it would be better to get a home test, or to be tested at a walk-in testing centre. Everyone who told us they had been able to get a test received their results quickly.

We asked the people who had not been tested about their perceptions of testing. Some people were unsure who was able to get a test. There was some confusion around whether or not people who had been in contact with a person who had tested positive for Coronavirus/COVID-19 would be able to get a test if they did not have symptoms themselves.

Some participants said they felt wary of visiting a walk-in testing site. They told us that they lived near temporary walk-in sites and were put off by long queues outside the testing centre, and were worried queueing for a test could expose them to Coronavirus/COVID-19 if they did not have it already.

Others were concerned about how they might access tests if they did develop symptoms. This was particularly the case for people who had no access to private transport. One person said they had been unable to access a home test because their address could not be verified by the online booking system.

Some people told us that, although they had not been tested themselves, they knew other people who had waited over three days to get test results back.

The NHS COVID App

We asked participants whether they were aware of the NHS COVID App, which can be used to track people's exposure to COVID-19, and if they had downloaded it. Everyone was aware of the app, but only five people had downloaded it.

We asked people who had not downloaded it why. Some people told us they were unable to download it because they did not have the correct technology. Others said they were unsure what the benefit of using the app was. Some people had concerns about data protection and how their information would be used.

Some people also questioned how helpful the app would be as they were aware of workplaces discouraging employees from using the app or having it active in the workplace. Others said they were concerned about how accessible it was for people who were not confident with smartphone technology, or who did not speak English or had English as a second language.

Where people had concerns around using the app, we asked what, if anything, would reassure them. People told us that they felt information that was available at a local level about infection rates, provided by Liverpool City Council, was more helpful than information available through the NHS COVID App. Others told us they thought localised public health approaches to containing outbreaks could be better distribute information among communities. People also told us the most clear and useful information they had received about Coronavirus/COVID-19 had come via schools.

Where people had downloaded the app, we asked what their experience using it was like. A number of people told us they had received 'false' or disappearing notifications about possible COVID exposure. They said that this had affected their trust in the app.

We also asked participants if they were aware of NHS 119, the Coronavirus testing hotline. Seven participants were unaware of NHS 119.

Contact Tracing

We asked participants if they had been contacted by contact tracers. The role of contact tracers is to try and limit the spread of Coronavirus/COVID-19 by getting in touch with people who have been in close contact with another person who has tested positive for Coronavirus/COVID-19.

Three people said they had been contacted by contact tracers. Two people told us they had not been contacted, even though they had been in contact with people who had tested positive for Coronavirus/COVID-19.

One person who had not been contacted told us told us they learned that a colleague at their workplace had tested positive, but that no staff were informed of this at the time.

Another person who had not been contacted told us that a family member they lived with had tested positive, but other members of their household had not been contacted with information about what to do by contact tracers. This person told us the household was unsure about who needed to self-isolate, and how long for.

One person told us their partner had been contacted by contact tracers. Their partner had been exposed through work, and was informed a colleague had tested positive two days before contact tracers got in touch. Their partner was sent a text and received a phone call from contact tracers.

People were unsure about whether or not they had to self-isolate after testing negative if they had been in contact with someone who had caught COVID. This included people who had been contacted by contact tracers, as well as people who had not been contacted.

Conclusion

Overall, we found that people had mixed experiences of Coronavirus testing, and NHS Track and Trace. A number of participants expressed a desire for clearer and more accessible information around testing, self-isolation, and contact tracing. People that we spoke to had differing levels of knowledge regarding these issues, but all agreed that information could be made clearer and more accessible.

Where we use your feedback

We use the feedback we receive from the public to inform how the health and social care sector is responding to the pandemic both locally and nationally.

Locally, we will pass this feedback on to Liverpool City Council and the local Public Health team who organise and co-ordinate local testing sites. We'll also pass this information on to other local decision makers, including Liverpool Clinical Commissioning Group. Nationally, we will pass this information on to Healthwatch England. They use the information they get from local Healthwatch across England to build a picture of what is happening nationally. They feed into national reports, research, and Parliamentary enquiries.

If you have any feedback about testing for Coronavirus/COVID-19 within Liverpool, or about NHS Track and Trace, you can contact us at engagement@healthwatchliverpool.co.uk, or complete our online survey about the local impact of Coronavirus/COVID-19 at https://healthwatchliverpool.co.uk/covid-survey.