Test and Trace - briefing, December 2020

This briefing focuses on Test and Trace, drawing on the results of our most recent COVID-19 briefing published in November, and updated from feedback gathered this month. An eighth (12.3%) of our feedbacks and signposting since July have been related to testing (32 of 260[1]). Of this feedback, there has been much frustration regarding Test and Trace, with a lack of clarity of guidance (41%), inability to access tests (34%), and a failure of the track and trace system (16%) being the main issues raised.

Confusion over Guidance

A significant proportion of our calls have been from members of the public who have been seeking advice regarding testing, enquiring when they can get a test, how to book a test, and if they should get a test. Members of the public are also indicating they are receiving conflicting guidance. This indicates a failure of clarity in communication. We have been maintaining up-to-date information on our website to help inform the public.

> It is confusing with the local restrictions in place. The ward 'Craven' in Bradford is under local lockdown but the district of Craven in North Yorkshire is not and it is confusing knowing what you are allowed to do and how you are allowed to interact with people in neighbouring areas."
> - Engagement Meeting, Anonymous, Craven, October

Recommendation 1: Clear, transparent, and accessible information should be provided to the public.

Unavailable Tests

Being unable to book a test has been another common theme. Home kits have been limited, and members of the public have reported that they have been directed to testing sites 50+ miles away. This makes it particularly difficult for people without transport, or those who are unable to get sufficient time off work (a significant factor for those in low-paid or insecure work). Lack of availability for tests also impacts those who need tests to be able to work, such as some key workers, and those requiring one before going into hospital.

Recommendation 2: Testing availability should be increased to meet the demand of the community, and site locations should be chosen on population need.

Track and Trace Failures

We have also heard from members of the public who have not been contacted after being in proximity to others who have tested positive for COVID-19. This has resulted in much confusion and anxiety from members of the public, who do not know what to do, and who are concerned that they may be spreading the virus. Additionally, we are hearing from national intelligence, that some people are not getting tested if they are not instructed to, in order to avoid receiving a COVID-positive result.[2]

> A caller saying that they are confused if they must isolate. They received a message from a colleague with whom they are working with that the colleague has tested positive for COVID-19. The caller has not been advised by their employer on the next steps, and they have not received any

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[1] As of 30th November 2020

[2] Healthwatch England. 2020. *What are people telling us about COVID-19 testing?: Key messages from our evidence – 5 October 2020*. Unpublished document. p.5

notifications by the NHS app. The caller is employed at a big retailer shop and is worried about spreading the coronavirus.
- Phone, anonymous, Harrogate, November

Recommendation 3: Communication should be improved to ensure people are contacted promptly and positive messaging should be used to encourage people to get tested.

Improving the Test & Trace system

On the 30th November, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) hosted an event to gather feedback on how to improve engagement with the Test and Trace system. Healthwatch North Yorkshire, along with many organisations across the UK, attended to feedback the experiences that we had gathered, highlighting the issues raised above.

Organisers from the DHSC recognised the importance of the feedback they received and provided assurances that efforts were being made to improve the situation. This includes the expansion of community champions to provide up-to-date guidance, improving locations of testing sites, looking at who performs the tests and exploring improved methods of testing to improve people's accessibility.

Healthwatch North Yorkshire welcomes the improvements that DHSC are undertaking. We will continue to work with local and national organisations to improve the system of Test and Trace and monitor feedback from patients and the public in North Yorkshire to ensure their voice is present in Health and Social Care decisions.

Recommendation 4: DHSC should ensure it includes and listens to the public and Community Support Organisations in its decision making and that it responds to the diverse needs of the population.