

Kirklees Council: Managing a COVID-19 factory outbreak lessons learned

Kirklees' Council's learning from managing a COVID-19 outbreak in a factory: Be proactive, clear, concise and to work side-by-side with all organisations and communities involved.

Outbreak

On the week of 8 June 2020, Kirklees Council were notified by Public Health England (PHE) of an outbreak of Covid 19 in a meat processing factory within the borough. The Council's response to this outbreak has been commended by Government as an example of good practice. This case study shares their learning from this experience and how the Council have built on this to inform responses to future outbreaks.

Response

The Council's focus was on protecting the health of residents and every decision they made had protecting local people at its heart. The immediate priority was to contain infections. They worked with PHE, the business and their staff immediately.

- *Testing:* Mobile testing units were brought in and procedures implemented seamlessly across authorities and agencies. Tests were offered to all staff, with those who tested positive then being asked to self-isolate. In total, 165 members of staff tested positive.
- *Contact tracing:* The Council helped the national Test and Trace programme to then work with staff to trace people they had been in contact with and asked those people to self-isolate for 14 days. By working so closely with the business and PHE, Kirklees were able to significantly reduce the amount of people who contracted the virus.

Foundations for success and lessons learned

Efficiency of response: The efficiency of Kirklees's response was the reason why the Government praised the Council and partner organisations in the first place.

Communications: As with a lot of workforces, English was not everyone's first language. Getting important information accurately translated into different languages was a crucial part of keeping staff informed.

Partnership working: Striking up close relationships was invaluable, especially with the business involved. In the two significant outbreaks Kirklees have now experienced, both businesses went beyond the requirements on testing and temporarily closing their operations which helped contain outbreaks – personifying partnership working at its best.

Togetherness: The way people in Kirklees pulled together to help fight coronavirus locally and care for the most vulnerable people in the borough was key to success from beginning. This togetherness was the most important factor for the Council in managing the initial outbreak. Without the support of community groups, volunteers, businesses, schools and so many more, the area would not be in the position they are in today.

Balance between public health and transparent public messaging: One of the biggest challenges was getting the balance right between protecting public health and sharing public information. From a public health perspective, disclosing the location of the outbreak would not have helped combat the spread of infection, and the Council wanted all businesses to act in the same responsible way as this one had done. As Kirklees sought the cooperation and coordination of all the partners involved and focused on containing infections, the wider community was not informed, meaning that when the Health and Care Secretary Matt Hancock referred to Kirklees as an example of good practice a week later on national television, naturally, local people wanted to know more and sooner.

Reflection and learning: As an organisation that listens to its residents and learns from their experiences, Kirklees consciously took a step back following the outbreak to look at how it could manage any future outbreak differently. To address the fact that residents wanted to know more, the Council developed a communications protocol. This focused on working closely with PHE and any business or organisation that has an outbreak, using cooperation to give local people as much information as possible at the earliest opportunity.

Building on this learning

Kirklees have since managed another outbreak at a workforce on a smaller scale - at local bed factory that had eight confirmed COVID-19 cases. The Council's management of this outbreak demonstrates how listening and working with residents and partners have led to improvement as an organisation and as a borough.

The Council implemented their new communications protocol in partnership with PHE and the factory. All three organisations worked together to provide as much information as possible, at the earliest opportunity and proactively released those messages. Local people knew where the outbreak was, how many people had tested positive and the Council answered every question people asked about the previous outbreak in a clear and concise Q&A. Residents quickly thanked and praised the Council for this. The lessons Kirklees have learnt from this will now feed into their broader communications and engagement plan to help people understand and trust the Test and Trace system moving forward.

The Council's advice to anyone else in this position is to be proactive, clear, concise and to work side-by-side with all organisations and communities involved.

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