

Local and GP Testing

Walk through site

Over 50% of Newham's residents do not have a private vehicle, and so the council was keen to participate in the Walk Through Testing Site pilot with the Department of Health & Social Care and Deloitte. The goal of the site was to reach those who did not have a car. Very initial discussions began on June 2nd and the Walk Through Testing Site was opened on June 23rd. From the point where the site was confirmed to build and opening was a matter of days.

The location was chosen from a shortlist for three key reasons; (1) that it was far enough away from main transport hubs to reduce travel via public transport when symptomatic, (2) community demographics and (3) proximity to local services. It is located in the rear car park of a healthcare centre in East Ham, and is accessed from a different road to the health centre facility.

The test site is open 8am-8pm, 7 days a week (the same as other national walk through pilots) and has 5 testing bays. With 20 minute appointments, the test site can accommodate 180 appointments per day. Only one appointment is required for each household.

Since opening the test site, bookings have been at 100% most days with an average of 21.8 no shows, and 12.5 walk ups. There has been an increase in walk up tests from an average of 7 between opening and July 9th, to an average of 20.8 since July 10th. Since July 17th 2 hours have been set aside at the test centre for the asymptomatic testing of key professionals (8am-9am and 7pm-8pm). Initial focus of asymptomatic testing has been on pharmacy staff, hairdressers, barbers, and pub and bar staff.

There has been limited public communications about the Walk Through Testing Centre. A letter was distributed to nearby houses to alleviate concerns. It was also mentioned in a short article in the Newham Recorder and in the council's magazine and mayoral daily letter. However, it should be noted that the site benefited from opening at the same time as it became possible to book walk through tests on the national testing portal.

GP testing

Some Newham residents may struggle to access services through the usual pathways for multiple reasons including: language barriers, mistrust of the system, or lack of access to technology. Therefore, in Newham there is a GP Wraparound Testing Service which has been developed in collaboration with primary care and Barts NHS Trust.

The GP Wraparound Testing Service provides testing for residents who are unlikely to be able to engage with the national testing system by providing a home testing kit. Residents are sent a home testing kit by the Home Monitoring Service (HMS) which is tested at Barts lab.

The HMS contacts the resident, supporting and talking them through the process to ensure they are able to self-administer the test, they understand how they will receive their results and to refer them to the COVID-19 helpline if they need practical help to self-isolate (like food, prescriptions, finance). During the conversation they explain that if the patient receives a positive result they will be contacted by the Track and Trace programme, encouraging residents to proactively compile a list of close contacts and reminding them of possible memory triggers. If residents are reluctant to share their contacts' details with the national system they are provided with information about how the data will be used, and it is suggested that they reach out to their contacts themselves.

Voluntary Sector Support for Self-Isolators

Working in partnership with Community Links, a voluntary sector organisation with experience of making calls to residents to encourage cancer screening uptake, Newham created a COVID-19 Helpline which residents can contact to ask questions about testing, test and trace, and isolating. The goal of the Helpline is to encourage people to take part in testing as well as test and trace, while also supporting them to isolate properly. The helpline can both signpost but also help residents to access the support they might need, whether that is financial or food, or relating to mental health or bereavement. The helpline also has access to a small pot of money which has been set aside to fund microgrants to residents who may not be able to self-isolate for financial reasons. The microgrant pays the equivalent of statutory sick pay for two weeks.

The Helpline call handlers were existing staff at Community Links who have experience in making / taking calls about medical conditions. The helpline has been set up as an eight week prototype to gather evidence about the sort of skills and capacity which may be needed over the longer term.

The call handlers were provided with a script and recording form created by the Newham Public Health team to ensure a robust approach to data collection including demographic information, and that the call handlers provide accurate information. Call handlers can conduct calls in multiple languages to enable more residents to be able access information. Whilst the script and data are important, perhaps even more important is the ability of the call handlers to establish trust and rapport quickly and to address any of the underlying feelings and fears of callers.

The Helpline is currently open 1-7pm, 7 days a week, and can be contacted by phone and email. As part of the prototype the timings are being regularly reviewed to ensure capacity is available at peak times.

Community Links meets with Newham Council staff twice a week to review progress. They also provide anonymised data weekly to identify patterns in the queries coming into the Helpline and therefore update the guidance document and provide feedback to service areas. To date the two key areas of request have related to food, and to advice relating to getting tested prior to overseas travel. There have been very limited requests for help to self-isolate and no requests have needed to be funded by the microgrant.

The Helpline has been promoted via hard copy and digital postcards and business cards (below) which have been distributed through multiple channels including; GP practices, pharmacies, Newham University Hospital, voluntary sector organisations, #HelpNewham food boxes, COVID-19 Health Champions, schools, and Environmental Health Officers. It has also been shared on Newham Council social media and in the residents' magazine. In addition the business card is included with every test kit provided by the Home Monitoring Service and with every receipt card at the local Walk Through test centre.

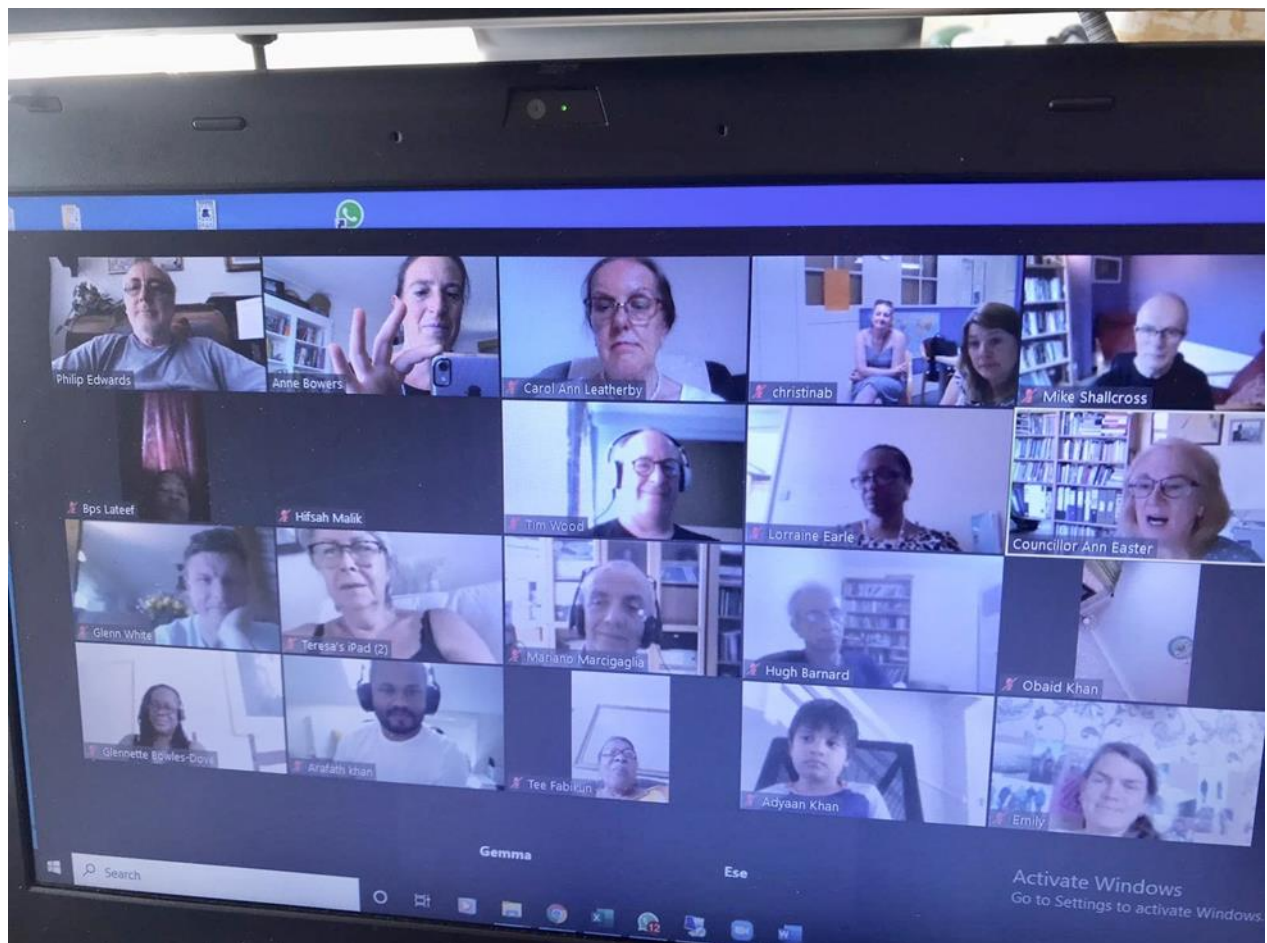
Business card:

Champions also questions back through email and whatsapp, and by phoning the Champions lead. The questions are answered by the Public Health team or other relevant colleagues and answers are then shared back with the whole group.

A dedicated website has all of the information that has gone out to the champions to date. www.newham.gov.uk/covidhealthchampions.

Drop in sessions

Drop in sessions are held three times a week for champions to spend time with each other, to feed back what they are doing and to have a chance to hear about information on specific topics – eg Food. These sessions are currently held virtually. They are hosted by public health.



Meeting champions

Champions can be anyone in Newham; the diversity of people who have signed up is excellent. There are no requirements on age, expertise, time commitment etc.



Adyaan recently turned 7 years old. "I was born in Newham and currently attend Ellen Wilkinson Primary School in Beckton. I love the diverse community of Newham, the Olympic Park, and most importantly I love taking bike rides across Newham Docks. I decided to be a Champion as I thought it would be a very good opportunity to gain more knowledge on coronavirus and share it with everyone at my school and the community links I'm part of within Newham. As a Champion, I've been very actively sharing the information in my school's newsletter and speaking to family members and friends about important new developments."

"I'm **Balraj Singh Lotay** and I've been living in Newham since 2002, born and bred in Newham, schooled, represented Newham for their rowing team and runner up for the 2017 young mayor of Newham."

I decided to become a champion as I care for my 81year old grandmother, who is within the high risk category and I would like for her and the elderly people in Newham to be able to get support and to feel safe during the pandemic."



Elizabeth has lived in Newham for 5 years. "I live in Forest Gate and minister / manager for three churches in Stratford – Stratford Methodist Church, Stratford New Town and Keir Hardie in Canning Town. When we spoke she said, In our churches we have people coming in from the community so I want to be able to share information with people who come in and who use our buildings. I put the information in the churches to give general information to people that I meet and people in the community who use our church buildings. I post all the information there for them to know what is going on."



Johnny have lived in East Ham in Newham since 2002. "I have taught for eighteen years in Newham Schools. At times, residents would asked questions and was sometimes unable to give meaningful answers based on up to date information. I was shocked by reports of high death rates in Newham during the peak of the pandemic. I am passionate about achieving health equality and I believe one way to move in this direction is to provide as much accurate local information to as many local people as possible. "

What's happened so far

More than 200 people have signed up from across the borough to be champions who are sharing information and talking to their community, friends and family. Champions are sharing information via WhatsApp, Facebook, Next Door, school newsletters, and conversations.

Feedback includes;

"My community all really really value what is coming out and that it's pictures so you can understand it even if you're reading isn't great"

"I'm sharing it with my friends and they are saying they find it really useful"

"The information about food has been really helpful – very pleased to get that"

"I'm on the Newham mosques WhatsApp group and am sharing everything with them"

"I'm telling my friends at our distanced coffee mornings"