

Local Outbreak Engagement Board

2 March 2021

Symptom free testing (Lateral Flow Testing) Programme

1. Purpose

This report provides an update on the symptom free testing programme roll out to date and future roll out plans within the borough.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That, subject to any comments Board Members may wish to make, the update report of the Lateral Flow Testing programme in Walsall be noted.

3. Report detail

- The main aim of the programme is to deliver locality-based symptom free testing across Walsall to support the community response to COVID-19 by identifying asymptomatic cases, therefore reducing case rates and community transmission of the virus.
- As a nationwide lockdown was announced at the beginning of January, with people being encouraged to stay at home, this programme has been focussed on testing critical workers who have to leave home to work.
- Testing of asymptomatic critical workers at symptom free testing sites started in Walsall on 4th January 2021. These critical workers are encouraged to attend testing twice weekly.
- The programme now has eight live sites across the borough including:
 - Blakenall community centre
 - Education Development Centre
 - Ryecroft Community Hub
 - Willenhall Chart community centre
 - Darlaston Town Hall
 - University of Wolverhampton, Walsall Campus*
 - Town Hall**
 - Depot***

staff, students and invited critical workers only; **Council staff based at town hall and blue light workers only; *Council staff based at the Depot only*

- As of 22nd February 2021, the programme has completed 5113 tests, which has identified 36 asymptomatic cases that were required to self-isolate on testing positive. These sites can scale capacity up or down, and have current testing capacity of up to 9,000 tests a week.
- Children's homes will have access to lateral flow device tests from the week commencing 22 February, enabling them to test staff twice weekly, and complete daily testing if in an outbreak situation.
- Further planned sites include:
 - Aldridge Community Centre
 - Saddlers Centre
 - A number of community pharmacies offering access to testing outside of usual working hours and weekends
- Critical Walsall businesses that remain open, where employees are unable to work from home, have access to community testing via two routes:
 - Businesses with 50+ employees, that are registered in England, can register to order Lateral Flow devices through a national online portal
 - Businesses with fewer than 50 employees are encouraged to support their workforce to access the community testing sites across the borough.
- Critical workers currently do not have to book, as sites operate on a walk-in basis. However, a booking system is currently being commissioned which will support critical workers to book appointments at a community testing site or pharmacy site.
- Operation Eagle has resulted in a pause on any significant communications messages regarding symptom free testing. Communications plan and activities will resume following the conclusion of the surveillance exercise.

Next steps

- Mobilise the future planned sites to have in place a significant testing infrastructure
- Following national guidance announcements from Government and DHSC, due week commencing 22 February, review and update the strategy for the next phase of testing. This will take into account:
 - Supporting local businesses with access to and uptake of testing
 - Supporting larger businesses with training needs to mobilise their testing sites and regularly use symptom free testing
 - Working closely with under-represented groups and communities to improve their access to symptom free testing
- Push communications regarding symptom free testing to eligible groups, re-enforcing messaging regarding the value of twice weekly testing

4. Conclusion

- There is good symptom free testing capacity and availability across all sites; with uptake of testing increasing week on week
- This ensures there is a significant and sustainable testing infrastructure in place to respond flexibly to future changing national / local contexts and demands
- This will support developing the next phase of the strategy to ensure Walsall can provide accessible symptom free testing across the borough.

Background papers

There are no background papers for this agenda item

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