

Vulnerable Groups – Ethnic Minorities - COVID-19 Contact Tracing

Action Plan Update

Introduction

- 1. The Public Health Agency (PHA) is central to ensuring engagement, cooperation and compliance on the 'Test, Trace, Protect' COVID-19 key messages launched on 10th July 2020.**
- 2. There are increased risks for specific vulnerable groups within the Northern Ireland (NI) population and therefore a need to put measures in place to support pro-active steps to optimise testing, tracing and compliance with PHA COVID-19 Guidelines. This Action Plan addresses pro-active and responsive measures targeting vulnerable groups that includes various ethnic background groups.**

Background

- 3. Figures from the 2011 Census show the diverse nature of the ethnic minority community in Northern Ireland (NI). Over 32,000 people, representing almost 2% of the NI population, indicated their ethnicity as something other than 'white' (NI Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025). Within the ethnic minority population there are a large number of people who are at a significantly increased risk due to economic and social disadvantage. In addition, co morbidities, obesity, diabetes, hypertension and cardio-metabolic complications and smoking increase the risk of disease severity.**
- 4. Additional and related risk factors include language barriers, occupation, poverty / no recourse to public funds, overcrowded and multiple occupancy housing, use of communal transport and public transport, household composition and conditions. This means that the COVID-19 pandemic is not a crisis which just affects health but it also has an impact upon social and economic factors.**
- 5. The Review of disparities in the risk and outcomes of Covid-19 (Public Health England (PHE) June 2020) shows that there is an association between belonging to some ethnic groups and increased likelihood of testing positive and dying with COVID-19. A particular focus on early intervention, prevention**

and reacting quickly to outbreaks within vulnerable groups is vital to reduce the numbers testing positive for COVID-19 and subsequent potential deaths.

6. The NI Racial Equality Strategy (2015-2025) identifies significant and challenging social, housing, education, community, economic and health issues within the context of differential poorer outcomes that impact on the lives of minority ethnic people across the community. A number of the aims such as 'Equality of Service Provision' and 'Participation' are relevant to the PHA Action Plan. The Racial Equality Strategy also highlights the need for ethnic monitoring which is paramount during COVID-19 to successfully trace and monitor those who test positive for COVID-19 and identify any gaps in service provision.

7. There is an obvious need for sensitivity to avoid an increase in negative false stereotyping, hostility towards and 'blaming' of minority ethnicity communities. A Sage report (July 2020) on Disparities in the impact of COVID-19 in Black and Minority Ethnic Populations provides recommendations for developing culturally appropriate messaging for BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) Groups. Work with community and voluntary partners is critical in taking this forward to ensure that the Public Health messages around COVID-19 are 'tailored to reflect local realities and consider cultural norms, accessibility of services, and financial disadvantage'.

Action Plan

8. The Action Plan highlights the planning process that would be supportive of and provide regular updates to the Contact Tracing Steering Group, PHA Second Wave Planning Group and PHA Health Improvement Recovery Plan. It is divided into three sections: Early Intervention/Prevention, Reaction to Identification of Clusters and Other Factors e.g. Racism, ethnic monitoring, sensitivities in local communities etc. The key outcomes to be achieved under each heading are listed below.

Early Intervention / Prevention

- Provision of appropriate COVID-19 messages which target Vulnerable Groups and the BAME population to ensure that they understand COVID-19 prevention and other messages e.g. when/where/why/how to get tested, what

to do if a test is positive, hand washing, social distancing, travelling to work, quarantine, etc.

- To explore the use and promotion of the new COVID-19 App for vulnerable groups.

Reaction to Identification of clusters

- Testing of vulnerable groups during an outbreak.
- Support health protection during COVID-19 outbreaks.

Other factors

- Racism and sensitivities in local communities.
- Data collection, ethnic and nationality monitoring.
- Support those with no recourse to public funds and those experiencing poverty.
- Supporting Vulnerable Groups to register with a GP.
- Supporting the development of Equality Impact Assessment for contact tracing service.

9. To date a number of actions have been successfully completed as noted below.

- Mandatory wearing of face coverings in shops - messages disseminated in different languages via community and voluntary sector social media and shared with other organisations who support BAME.
- 9,000 face masks that will be produced through a social enterprise initiative will be distributed through Department of Communities to targeted BAME population via Community and Voluntary sector following discussions with PHA key stakeholders supporting the PHA Action Plan.
- Community and Voluntary sector staff attended mobile testing site to support testing of production staff from various ethnic backgrounds.
- Adaption of car sharing leaflet by PHA Communications Team into various languages. Contact made with Ethnic Background Group to disseminate this information via video message as many from Ethnic minority groups have limited literacy.

- Active support and input to Incident Management Teams through follow up communication with target groups ensuring appropriate information and links with community organisations.
- PHA Safer Shopping Posters in 11 languages on PHA website. Disseminated to Regional BAME and Traveller Group members for them to pass on to their contacts regionally.
- Links established with CYPSP (Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership) and NICVA (NI Council for Voluntary Action) to share PHA messages.
- Identification of avenues for further dissemination of information to target populations through the workplace e.g. Health Improvement Workplace contacts; Health and Safety Executive
- Links continue with Inter-Ethnic Forum staff – voice-over of relevant information; re-issue of prevention messages; supporting staff who are self-isolating to ensure they have adequate support.
- Meeting with CBBB (Crossing Borders Breaking Boundaries) – Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Community Inter-Cultural Programme, Migrants Rights Centre Ireland and UU to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on BAME communities in NI.

Public Health Agency

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