

Trialling Self-Test Collect in the SDA Church – Proposition

Aim:

To pilot the collection of Self-Test kits from churches, particularly where there is a large black population, so people can easily access testing and reassurance within their community.

Background

The COVID-19 figures show an increased risk for some communities with socioeconomic and geographical factors also playing a feature. Where people live, particularly in London and other cities, has had a large effect on the risk of individuals catching COVID-19. Factors such as occupational exposure (having a job that's very people facing like nursing, taxi/bus driver, teaching), population density, household composition and pre-existing health conditions may contribute to the higher infection and mortality rates, particularly some ethnic groups.

Past national and local government policies, alarming media reports and general uncertainty have resulted in low trust and low engagement in some areas of our society, Particularly the Black community. This can partly explain why there is a lower uptake of testing. We want to increase both the accessibility and uptake of testing across all social groups to enable protection within their immediate and wider community. One approach could be to use the familiar and trusted relationships that exists within the faith communities as faith leaders have told us that 'our communities trust us, so use us'.

Rationale

Only way to make testing universal is via capitalising on the community testing programme which is aimed at bringing testing as locally and community owned as possible.

Research shows that some populations in our society such as particular ethnic groups are more likely to listen to a trusted member of their community for health-related guidance. Therefore, it is key to empower local communities to support the testing of their audience in a way that is relatable and meets their needs. We have trialled this approach elsewhere (a mosque in Birmingham, Anglican church in Barnet, Synagogue in Hendon). It has proved to be successful in identifying positive COVID-19 cases among asymptomatic individuals, but also in increasing awareness and access around COVID-19 testing – both of which are essential to protect the wider community.

Target audience(s)

The Faith community, and Individuals who find it easier accessing faith or voluntary organisations in their local community

Why use The Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA)?

The Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) have an incredibly strong (and articulated) community mission. They have a longstanding and well-respected history of delivering community health and welfare initiatives and have already engaged some of their churches as vaccination sites and working with their local authorities. They are active across England and importantly in localities of enduring transmission. The SDA church is an excellent trail as significant numbers of their churches are black majority. Additionally, their strong organisational governance and health mission which aligns with DHSC work.

- The impact and role of faith/churches for black faith communities is well recognised and documented
- Churches are central in localities and have a strong community mission
- Enables individuals to collect their test kits supported by trusted members of their communities able to offer guidance and support regarding COVID-19 testing

How will the test kits be provided?

Self-test kits will be collected by or delivered to church venues as part of their local authority (LA) Community Collect initiative. The LA would work hand in hand with these identified 'church sites' with the LA arranging for the collection, delivery and tracking of the kits to fulfil the MHRA reporting requirements. It is within the LA's discretion how they best resource participating organisations.

- LA allocate batches to participating church sites
- Responsible adults at church sites hand out test kits, are on hand to dispel anxieties and misinformation amongst those testing and may give guidance re how to test
- Wider digital, emotional and literacy support could be offered at the site in a relatable and trusted way (where already in existence or readily extendable)
- DSHC would offer training and support to enable churches/organisations to operate safely and will provide the necessary operational support
- People use pharmacy, ATS, schools, online, workplace or churches to collect tests
- Churches, like schools and workplace, can help individuals with their 'first testing experience' and support ongoing existing testing behaviours

What's required by the church site?

Willingness to be a collection point for individuals in your community wanting to pick up a Self-Test kit.

- An accessible space to put up a table (and maintain social distance)
- Two or more persons to hand out tests, keep the space clean and keep brief records
- Help and support to individuals picking up test kits

How will we know what to do?

DHSC Test and Trace Underrepresented groups staff will provide:

- Preparatory zoom calls to explain what would be involved, signage and paperwork
- Access to (**optional**) online videos supporting (lateral flow devices) LFD testing and processing, enabling people to familiarise themselves with the process
- A checklist to ensure churches are familiar with and able to meet some basic requirements around storing, using and processing LFDs, when PPE (personal protective equipment) is required, registrations and reporting results
- A virtual walk through of churches/sites immediately prior to them opening
- Support with quality assuring and evaluating your success in this testing

Please note the tests themselves are supported with guidance from NHS Test and Trace which is designed to support an individual to self-test easily.

How often will we need to be open?

We anticipate that the testing will be designed safely around any existing activities and would ask for one day a week at a minimum.

When will this start and end?

DHSC would like to see this operational by 10 May 2021, (recognising some churches may be able to start sooner than others) and propose to run this pilot for a period of 12 weeks and review every 4 weeks.

Next Steps

1. Your agreement in principle to proceed by Wednesday 28 April 2021
2. DHSC will provide a planning schedule for setting up each site