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Oral/Poster presentation

Blake, H.; Corner, J.; Cirelli, C.; Hassard, J.; Briggs, L.; Daly, J.M.; Bennett, M.; Chappell, J.G.; Fairclough, L.; McClure, C.P.; Tarr, A.; Tighe, P.; Favier, A.; Irving, W.; Ball, J. Perceptions and Experiences of the University of Nottingham Pilot SARS-CoV-2 Asymptomatic Testing Service: A Mixed-Methods Study.

Abstract

We aimed to explore student and staff perceptions and experiences of a pilot SARS-CoV-2 asymptomatic testing service (P-ATS) in a UK university campus setting. This was a mixed-method study comprised of an online survey, and thematic analysis of qualitative data from interviews and focus groups conducted at the mid-point and end of the 12-week P-ATS programme. Ninety-nine students (84.8% female, 70% first year; 93.9% P-ATS participants) completed an online survey, 41 individuals attended interviews or focus groups, including 31 students (21 first year; 10 final year) and 10 staff. All types of testing and logistics were highly acceptable (*virus*: swab, saliva; *antibody*: finger prick) and 94.9% would participate again. Reported adherence to weekly virus testing was high (92.4% completed ≥ 6 tests; 70.8% submitted all 10 swabs; 89.2% completed ≥ 1 saliva sample) and 76.9% submitted ≥ 3 blood samples. Students tested to “keep campus safe”, “contribute to national efforts to control COVID-19”, and “protect others”. In total, 31.3% had high anxiety as measured by the Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7) (27.1% of first year). Students with lower levels of anxiety and greater satisfaction with university communications around P-ATS were more likely to adhere to virus and antibody tests. Increased adherence to testing was associated with higher perceived risk of COVID-19 to self and others. Qualitative findings revealed 5 themes and 13 sub-themes: “emotional responses to COVID-19”, “university life during COVID-19”, “influences on testing participation”, “testing physical and logistical factors” and “testing effects on mental wellbeing”. Asymptomatic COVID-19 testing (SARS-CoV-2 virus/antibodies) is highly acceptable to students and staff in a university campus setting. Clear communications and strategies to reduce anxiety are likely to be important for testing uptake and adherence. Strategies are needed to facilitate social connections and mitigate the mental health impacts of COVID-19 and self-isolation.