

July 7, 2020

Health and Mental Health/Access and Ability Committees Notes

Alternate side of the street parking presents challenges for the elderly and disabled when they have to park far away. Persons in wheelchairs are especially impacted. Outside restaurants have taken away many parking spots.

Testing and tracing Covid 19 patients present health justice problems. Can we get data for our district? A website was given.

Concerns over testing and tracing initiative. Messaging keeps changing. There is also a great deal of testing capacity, but it seems as though testing levels are nowhere near that capacity at the moment. As pointed out, the Brooklyn Army Terminal site, for example, has the capacity to conduct 12 tests simultaneously and the ability to test hundreds of people per day, and the most recently available data as of this meeting was from June 11th, and there were only 24 tests being conducted in total per day. Now that there's testing capacity and we're preparing for Phase 4, what is the plan? Does the city and state want everyone to get tested on a regular basis? What is the plan as the city begins to open up? This isn't currently clear in communications from city and state officials.

Concern over messaging regarding COVID-19 antibody testing. There's no data source for antibody testing. Our Lady of Perpetual Help ran antibody testing for 5 days, and the rate was 50% when they did that, higher than the 19-20% numbers we're seeing on average across New York City. That number may have been a self-selecting group of people who showed up because they had symptoms. Should New Yorkers be getting antibody testing?

Concerns over the long-term health effects to the Covid 19 population. Need to get information on this. Concern over people disposing of PPE on the streets. Need to consult with the Sanitation Department on this. Education to the public is needed to reduce this behavior.

Concern over opening up and being mandated to return to work. Can you lose your employment if you refuse? There are accommodations made for at risk populations.

People with hearing are having extraordinary difficulties understanding what others are saying due to face masks that prevent the ability to lip-read. Face shields can help to provide that visual access to people's mouths, but do not provide the same protection from the virus. There are now face masks that are being made that include clear windows so that people's mouths can be seen, and this might be a good option for some government agencies to consider for frontline staff that will be engaging with the public in-person.

In terms of accessibility, concerns were expressed that many public meetings hosted online do not include live captioning, making it hard for many people to understand what's being said in online spaces, including people whose first language is not English and people with hearing loss. The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities has put out guidelines on how to host accessible meetings online but many public agencies are not following these protocols.

People with non-apparent mobility challenges have been denied the ability to board in the front of the bus during the pandemic. Jeremy indicated that he had addressed this with MTA, and that they clarified their policy with bus drivers.

United Senior Citizens of Sunset Park has secured washable masks that can be reused. The Department for the Aging has provided coupons for fruit and vegetables. Seniors need to apply for them. Also, free food can also be delivered to the home. Air conditioners are being made available to seniors as well as wellness calls. Seniors face challenges due to lack of knowledge of technology. Sunset Park has lost seniors and family members due to the virus.

Sunset Park has a high rate of persons with underlying health issues that make them vulnerable to coronavirus. There may be a correlation with living in a waterfront community. UPROSE is conducting a Climate and Community Health Assessment survey for Sunset Park (other parts of CB7 district are not included) that can be accessed on their website. The survey can also be mailed to residents. It is being translated into other languages and will be available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Arabic. They are also phone-banking the survey. Anyone can call UPROSE to take the survey which takes about 10 minutes. We need to put out the word to ensure maximum participation. UPROSE hopes to conclude the survey by August and publish the results by November.

Concern was raised over face masks causing mold in the lungs. A board member responded that there is a lot of misinformation spreading around during the pandemic. She did a cursory google search about this issue and it appears that there is no evidence that fungus or mold is a problem or concern.

Industry City is a Covid 19 testing center. People tested need to be retested and traced. Information is needed on antibody testing.

Other issues of concern involve insurance, unemployment, housing evictions, fear of resurgence of the virus upon opening up, food insecurity, social isolation and the emotional toll of loss of significant others.

The Health and Mental Health Committee will make efforts to reach out to representatives of the Department of Health and the NYC Office of Mental Health in order to host another tele-meeting to address the issues presented today and to get information on testing and tracing in the district.

The Ability and Access Committee will follow up on issues related to effective communication for people who have hearing loss.