

# Newham Community Vitamin D Programme

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## The Health Equity Ambition

Vitamin D is **essential for bone and muscle health**; deficiency is linked to weak bones, falls and fractures.

On average, 1 in 5 people in the UK has Vitamin D deficiency and this is higher for people who are 65 and older; people who have darker skin; people with low exposure to the sun; all pregnant and breastfeeding women and children under four years old.

In Newham, pregnant women, new mums and children under the age of 4 are already offered Vitamin D through the borough's universal Healthy Start vitamin scheme.

Newham is home to approx. 30,000 people aged 65+ and 58% identify as Black, Asian or from minoritised ethnic groups with dark skin.

While we don't have exact data on Vitamin D levels in Newham residents, evidence from elsewhere suggests the Vitamin D levels will be lower in communities where health equities are lowest. For example, in Surrey researchers found that 75% of South Asian women had Vitamin D deficiency compared to 5% of White women (Darling et al., 2013)

Delivery of testing and vaccination during COVID also showed that the communities most at risk of low Vitamin D appreciated going to local trusted places for their health services, including voluntary and community organisations and places of worship.



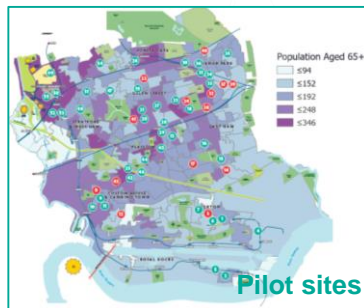
## The Approach

Newham's Diverse Communities Health and Wellbeing Forum recommended that the Council takes action to address Vitamin D deficiency, as part of our commitment to reducing health inequalities.

Newham Public Health team reviewed literature and practice and decided to pilot free Vitamin D supplements of 25ug (a prevention rather than treatment dose) to all residents 65 and older.

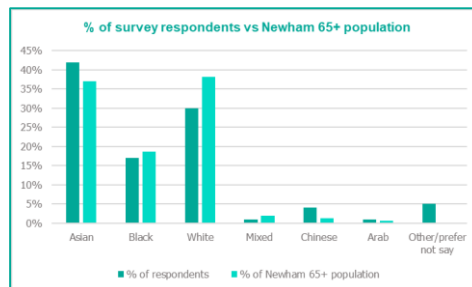
The pilot began in November 2021, for a period of 6 months.

60 voluntary and community organisations, faith organisations, GP practices, NHS Social Prescribers, pharmacies, libraries, community centres and NHS Roving Outreach Nurses all provided Vitamin D to residents. Voluntary, community and faith organisations donate their time and resources to distribute Vitamin D supplements in their communities and through outreach programmes, to residents aged 65+.



People at each site received training on how to inform and engage residents about the offer and potential benefits. They also received health promotion materials about Vitamin D and other health messages.

The Public Health Implementation Team regularly visited sites to hear what was happening and how the distribution was going. There was explicit investment in building relationships with each site, including team members with community languages and culturally relevant knowledge.



## Reflections and learning

- The programme has delivered substantial reach including into communities where Vitamin D levels are likely to be lower than healthy. There are still some communities where we need to work on our reach, particularly Black communities.
- The role of the Vitamin D Coordinator has been instrumental in enabling the sites to deliver and in shaping the programme. More than 40 sites have appreciated the support of the Coordinator, her insight and understanding in working with different community groups. In The Council it has catalysed collective action with common purpose as none of the organisations were commissioned
- Community locations are really eager to engage in programmes that are easy, well-supported and meet the needs of their communities.

## Learning From The Pilot

- For the 6 month pilot period **16,140 bottles** of Vitamin D supplements and **1,987 vegan supplements** were distributed
- Thirty-four percent (34%)** of people surveyed said prior to the intervention, they had either **never taken Vitamin D** supplements or used to take them, but **not anymore**. **Forty-six (46%)** of respondents said they were taking Vitamin D every day before getting them from the programme.
- The ethnic makeup of people who answered the survey suggested that there was **greater take up by residents** with greater risk of Vitamin D deficiencies, with **the exception of Black residents**.
- Most people who took up the offer learned about it through Newham's Public Health outreach tables (37%) with 15% hearing from friends and family and only 6% from health professionals.

## Other Impact

- Most sites have expanded their health offering to include other information about staying healthy. **3 sites are also doing outreach work and visiting residents homes** helping to address loneliness and isolation.
- Sites have used community opportunities to deliver the programme. Mosques offer residents Vitamin D following Friday prayers.
- The Vitamin D itself delivers benefits; and at the same time is a tool for wider engagement. It is enabling other health conversations and support to take place.

**Is this a sufficient evidence base on which to continue the programme given the robust evidence base on importance of Vitamin D?**