



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health



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Chief Executive

Friday message

Friday 5 February 2016

Dear everyone

The annual LGA/ADPH public health conference took place on Wednesday and I was delighted to be asked to speak to an audience which brought together amongst many others local politicians and Directors of Public Health – the people who represent the leadership of the public health system in places up and down the country. The conference showed us how these local leaders are focused on improving the health and prosperity of the people with real energy and commitment. Their focus on prevention and delivery is reinforced by the requirement on the NHS locally to work with councils as partners not just as consultees in developing their place based plans. Our job is to work with and support councils in their critical leadership role.

We have all seen the various news reports about the spread of Zika in Brazil and the Americas. Zika is a mild disease that doesn't exhibit symptoms in 80% of those infected. It is the potential link with Microcephaly that has caused understandable concern. Our PHE specialists have been very much involved in the UK's response. Using PHE's breadth of expertise from infectious disease surveillance, medical entomology, global health and many others we have been able rapidly to update the travel guidance, provide reassurance that the threat to the UK is extremely low and brief ministers about the situation. We are monitoring the situation very closely to make sure all necessary steps are being taken to protect the UK travelling public and are actively looking to see how we can help in those countries where Zika transmission is going on.

PHE scientists played a key role in an Ebola virus genetic fingerprinting study published this week in the journal Nature. Scientists deployed to West Africa as part of the European Mobile Laboratory (EMLab) and the WHO epidemiology team in Guinea used a cutting edge miniature sequencing device to rapidly analyse diagnostic samples from patients suffering from Ebola virus disease. The data helped front line epidemiologists to identify transmission chains. This was the first time the device had been used to provide real time sequencing information in a virus outbreak. The success of this study was achieved through effective collaboration between the EMLab, Birmingham University, WHO and the Oxford based company that supplied the device.

Yesterday was, of course, World Cancer Day and I was delighted to see that so much of PHE's work was centre stage. Our work on smoking, obesity and alcohol are central to the national focus on prevention alongside our marketing expertise in the Be Clear on Cancer Campaigns and the three Cancer Screening Programmes. PHE's National Cancer Registration and Analysis Service is the source of nearly all of England's data on everyone with cancer and as such drives many of the national and local analyses spanning the outputs we saw yesterday from the Office for National Statistics to Cancer Research UK. Accurate data on every cancer case is fundamental to our work on cancer and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to all those patients and their families for their support for our work.

Last week, PHE sent representatives to Geneva to attend the [UNISDR's Science and Technology Conference for the Implementation of the Sendai Framework 2015 – 2030](#). Professor Virginia Murray (who was also Chair of the UNISDR Organising Committee) and her team worked alongside multiple UN organisations, UN member states and many of the world's disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management scientists. Our presence in Geneva meant we were able to secure high level discussions engaging large sections of the disaster risk reduction community and ensure health was among the sciences which will feature in the [UNISDR Science and Technology Roadmap](#) that will guide the way science and technology are incorporated into disaster risk reduction over the next 14 years.

With best wishes