



Public Health  
England



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Chief Executive

## Friday message

Friday 8 August 2014

**Dear everyone**

As you will be aware from the widespread media coverage, parts of West Africa are in the grip of the largest recorded Ebola outbreak. Although it is not transmissible in the same way as flu because it is not airborne and we are unlikely to see many, if any, cases here, we nonetheless need to ensure our defence systems are watertight so that if someone does return to the UK with the infection, we can detect, diagnose and manage it promptly and appropriately. Many of our expert teams at PHE are heavily involved in providing support to colleagues in the NHS and across Government – everything from microbiological testing of samples and providing an algorithm for health professionals to determine whether further investigations need to be done, to providing advice on infection control, risk assessment and general information about the disease to the public via the media and our social media channels. In addition some of our experts have gone out to the region to support teams on the ground. I am very grateful to everyone for their tremendous work and especially to those who have gone out to Africa.

On Wednesday we submitted our [response](#) to the Government's consultation on standardised tobacco packaging. We want to see long-term reductions in the number of children who smoke and anything that makes smoking less attractive and spells out the damage it does to health is to be welcomed. Since the Government's last consultation in 2012, the evidence base on the impact of standardised tobacco packaging has expanded considerably, with the publication of numerous peer-reviewed studies and, most recently, the evidence from Australia following their implementation of standardised packaging. This has delivered the fastest decline in smoking rates in more than 20 years and customs and excise data shows a fall of 3.4 per cent in tobacco sales in the first year. We also know from surveys of young people in the UK and elsewhere that standardised packs, combined with hard hitting health messages, are less appealing to them. Of course, this is just one of a range of measures and initiatives that will steadily discourage people from smoking or taking it up, but its contribution to the cumulative effect is very important.

PHE is at the [forefront](#) of using new whole genome sequencing technologies to improve the diagnosis and control of infectious diseases. In what is a revolution in microbiology, in PHE we have already sequenced the genomes of more than 28,000 bacteria and viruses. In the context of the 100,000 Genomes Project, we are working with Genomics England and leading the implementation of whole genome sequencing of HIV, TB and hepatitis C. This new technology has already enabled us to improve our surveillance capability and outbreak investigations and we are determined to harness its full potential in the area of infectious diseases in supporting the NHS to deliver the best care for patients.

And finally, our first MORI public opinion [survey](#) has shown that at the end of our first year, a third of the public say they have heard of us and, when given an explanation of our role, two thirds would be confident in our advice. This is a sound beginning for us to build on.

**With best wishes**