



Public Health  
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health



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Chief Executive

## Friday message

Friday 10 October 2014

**Dear everyone**

As no one will have missed, many of our staff have been heavily involved in the Ebola response, at home and in West Africa for many months now, and this week we have moved up another gear, following developments in the US and Spain. As well as bolstering up our systems to ensure the UK is ready to detect, manage and treat a case in a returning traveller or healthcare worker, we have staff serving on the front line in Sierra Leone, providing expert advice, support and guidance, particularly on strategic management and infection control in the field hospitals, while a rotating group of research staff are supporting the European Mobile Labs in Guinea and Liberia. We are also helping to train the military in the use of personal protective equipment, and we are steadily building a unique Biobank of Ebola samples which we are mining for essential data, including on virus mutation/adaptation rates. The Prime Minister yesterday asked that we support additional screening measures at major ports of entry and take further steps to raise awareness of Ebola symptoms among those arriving from affected areas and provide advice on where to seek help if necessary. I want to pay tribute to the way in which our staff have responded to the increase in tempo without missing a beat and the level of commitment and resourcefulness they have shown in managing the significant challenges being posed. As more of our people have focused on Ebola, other colleagues have quietly stepped up to take over their day job, knowing this will go on for many months. I am most grateful for this flexibility and dedication.

Antibiotics are one of the most effective defences in helping us combat a range of serious infections. They transformed survival rates in diseases such as bacterial pneumonia which were often fatal and, unsurprisingly, came to be regarded as a universal panacea. The pressure on GPs to prescribe antibiotics has been immense, as can be seen in the first [annual report](#) from our English Surveillance Programme for Antimicrobial Utilisation and Resistance (ESPAUR), published today. Bringing together GP and hospital data for the first time, it shows that between 2010 and 2013 there was a six per cent increase in the combined antibiotic prescribing of GPs and hospitals, and there was a 12 per cent increase in antibiotic resistance in bloodstream infections caused by *E.coli*. The report will help local CCGs monitor the prescribing of hospitals and surgeries in their area and see how they compare against a benchmark and will help indicate where action needs to be taken.

Our [national flu campaign](#) launched on Monday, encouraging everyone at particular risk from the more serious effects of flu, such as pneumonia, to get vaccinated. This includes those with a health condition, even one which is well managed, who are pregnant or aged 65 and over. In addition, this year children aged 2 to 4 are now entitled to a free nasal spray vaccination which eliminates the need for an injection, and we and the NHS are doing all we can to raise awareness of this with parents. By reaching as many people as we can, we also hope to reduce the pressure this winter on GPs and A&E through avoidable illness.

And finally, on Tuesday I had the opportunity at the annual conference in Nottingham of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, to pay tribute to the front line contribution of environmental health practitioners who remain as important today as when they first began work 150 years ago. Whilst the ask of them has, of course, changed over the years, many of the fundamentals remain the same – for example, decent housing, good air quality and safe food.

**With best wishes**