



Public Health  
England



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Chief Executive

## Friday message

Friday 16 May 2014

### Dear everyone

Our epidemiologists, microbiologists and public health experts have been at the forefront of the global work around the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV), the new SARS-like virus that began to emerge about 18 months ago. One of the first cases was diagnosed at our Colindale laboratory where they have gone on to develop a series of tools for diagnosis and surveillance of the virus for use not only in the UK but also internationally. In the last couple of weeks our public health teams have also been involved in contact tracing of airline passengers following the identification of two cases in passengers travelling from Saudi Arabia to the US and transiting via London. This is PHE getting on with its health protection responsibilities.

On Wednesday we [published](#) the latest National Diet and Nutrition Survey, which reflects data from 2008 to 2012 and looks at the food and nutrient consumption of children and adults in the UK. The results again emphasise the major problem we have with diet and its contribution to obesity. We consume too much sugar, salt and saturated fat and not enough fruit and vegetables which increases the risk of heart disease, stroke and some cancers. For most of us, the foundations of our health and wellbeing in later life are laid when we are young and a healthy diet matters greatly to this. Of course, this is not a simple matter as food choice is affected by many individual and societal factors. Across the country, local authorities and voluntary and community groups are finding ways to help people make healthier choices. I am this morning visiting the Washingborough Academy, a primary school in Lincoln who are teaching their children how to feed themselves well for life as they and many schools recognise that this is one of the simplest and most effective ways to promote good health. It is good news that cooking will be included in the new school curriculum from September.

Keeping with the theme, inactivity is the fourth leading cause of ill health in the UK, equivalent to smoking in its contribution to chronic disease and premature death, costing the NHS over £1bn and society as a whole more than £6bn each year. Physical activity is effective in the prevention and management of over 20 chronic physical and mental conditions, including dementia, which is why we are working with local and national government, the NHS, health professionals, the voluntary and community sector, and business, to create a movement that will encourage everyone, young and old, to be active every day. Together we are working on a national physical activity framework which will focus on scaling up what works, engaging people in all walks of life, and encouraging social and physical environments that facilitate physical activity so that daily physical activity becomes the norm. Already we have support from Ministers and a truly vibrant and diverse range of partners with interests ranging from early years play and school sport, to workplace active travel, dance and outdoor pursuits.

And finally, the winner of the Nursing Standard first annual award for Public Health Nursing which recognises an outstanding initiative or innovation which has demonstrably contributed to improving and protecting the public's health is the Alcohol Day Detoxification Service run by Solent NHS Trust. Warm congratulations to them.

With best wishes