



Public Health
England

Protecting and improving the nation's health



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Chief Executive

Friday message

Friday 4 September 2015

Dear everyone

Being in public health is often being where others aren't, often in areas that are controversial at the time but that as time goes on and the evidence develops, what was once radical becomes the norm. In the meantime, you have to go with current best available evidence; the publication of our peer reviewed evidence review on e-cigarettes being a case in point. There is, of course, a debate about relative harm versus the precautionary principle but with millions of adults already vaping and significant public misunderstanding about the risks of e-cigarettes, we need to deal with the current reality. And that is that e-cigarettes carry a fraction of the health risk of smoking tobacco and the public are entitled to know this. We recognise the need for continued vigilance and research in this area including on the long-term health impact, uptake and patterns of use. Regulation is also an important part of winning public confidence. From October, sales to under 18s will be illegal and from next May the EU Tobacco Products Directive will bring in tighter regulations for the content and quality of e-cigarettes together with restrictions on advertising. The evidence also tells us that e-cigarettes help smokers to quit and, when combined with support from a Stop Smoking Service, can offer some of the highest successful quit rates. This is, admittedly, a controversial area and perhaps counterintuitive for some but it is our firm belief, based on the evidence, that e-cigarettes have a positive part to play in bringing down smoking rates.

On Wednesday the NHS announced a welcome [plan](#) to improve the health of its workforce. The positive steps the NHS is taking, co-designed with PHE, including better access to occupational health, encouraging more physical activity and healthier food options, will have radiated benefits for everyone else. The money saved by having a healthier workforce can be spent on services for the public and the healthier habits picked up by staff can be passed on to the people they serve. We are working hand in hand with NHS England on this, building on our work with local government, the third sector and businesses through the [workplace wellbeing charter](#). We are also working with NHS England, for example, in embedding the Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering and PHE guidance on healthier catering.

I am delighted to say that the Department for International Development has agreed to fund a £1.85m project for PHE to work with the Government of Pakistan and multiple partners in Pakistan, on the development of a national integrated system of infectious disease surveillance and response. This will assist Pakistan to become compliant with the WHO International Health Regulations. One million British people have dual citizenship with Pakistan and there are around 1.4 million journeys between Pakistan and the UK each year. This is an 18 month programme and will involve setting up a PHE team based both in Pakistan and the UK, working alongside locally employed staff. Depending on progress, this may lead to further collaboration over several years.

And finally, our Stoptober [campaign](#), now in its fourth year, launched this week, encourages smokers to stop smoking for 28 days – making it five times more likely they will quit for good. Once again, we are working with top comics to get smokers to sign up – you may have already seen the TV ads. There is lots of activity going on across the country led by local authorities, the local NHS and commercial partners. A new feature this year is that the comedians will be providing personal support via email, text and app throughout the 28 days to everyone who has signed up. We hope to see an even greater number sign up this year, building on the 750,000 people who have already taken part in previous years.

With best wishes