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PHE Bulletin, Public Health England's regular update, provides news and information on PHE and the public health landscape for all those concerned with the public's health. For more information see our website: www.gov.uk/phe

Public health news

Under-18 conception rate continuing to decline in England

New [Office for National Statistics figures](#) show the conception rate among under-18 year olds in England dropped by 12% to 24.3 per 1,000 in 2013, the lowest since records began. The under-16 conception rate for 2013 is 4.8 per 1,000 females aged 13 to 15, a 14% reduction from 2012. Since 1998, the under-18 conception rate has decreased by 48%. However, there remain significant variations in the under-18 conception rate across the country with the rate in some areas significantly higher than the England average. For more information see PHE's [press release](#).

PHE launches new tool to raise awareness about heart disease

PHE in partnership with the British Heart Foundation has launched a new [heart age tool](#) to raise awareness about heart disease. People can find out the age of their heart by inputting simple lifestyle information such as their weight and whether they smoke and see how this compares to their actual age. The personalised results, combined with the free NHS Health Check, give an opportunity for people to take action to reduce their risk of developing serious but preventable conditions such as heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, kidney disease and certain types of dementia. For more information see PHE's [press release](#).

Ebola news update

Since the beginning of February, five people with potential exposure to Ebola have been medically evacuated to the UK for assessment and monitoring, including an [Australian healthcare worker](#). PHE has worked with cross-government colleagues and international counterparts on these evacuations. Sierra Leone continues to record the vast majority of cases, reporting 1.4 times as many clinically confirmed cases in the last 21 days as Guinea and Liberia combined. In the last three weeks, incidence appears to have stabilised in the region of between 60 and 80 new cases each week. In Guinea there has been a slight decrease in clinically confirmed cases.

Report published on recent trends in life expectancy at older ages

PHE has published a report on [recent trends in life expectancy at older ages](#) in England. The data presented in this report shows there has been an overall upward trend in life expectancy at older ages in England since the early 1980s. More recent data from the early 2000s onwards shows there has also been an upward trend in the EU, the English regions and English local authorities. However, there are some fluctuations in these figures from year to year, particularly for the oldest age groups and for individual local authorities. For more information see PHE's [news story](#).

PHE and NHS England guide highlights importance of communities to health and wellbeing

A new [guide](#) from PHE and NHS England has identified how local government and the NHS have important roles in building confident communities to improve health and reduce inequalities. The guide calls on local partners to consider the 'family' of community centred approaches to improve health and wellbeing in their areas. For more information see PHE's [news story](#).

Report demonstrates how integrated working improves health of local communities

PHE and the Local Government Association have produced a report showing how integrated working by local government and local health teams and the voluntary sector can improve the health of local communities. The publication, [Local leadership, new approaches](#), includes seven case studies.

Pregnant women advised to avoid animals that are giving birth

Pregnant women who come into close contact with sheep during lambing may risk their own health, and that of their unborn child, from infections that such animals can carry. Cattle and goats that have recently given birth can also carry similar infections. Advice that women who are or may be pregnant should avoid animals that are giving, or have recently given, birth comes from the Department of Health, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and other government bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. For more information see the joint [press release](#).

PHE leading initiatives on surveillance and the evaluation of antibiotics

PHE has welcomed the second report from the Review on Antimicrobial Resistance. The new report, [Turning the tide on a global health crisis: initial steps](#), was commissioned by the Prime Minister in 2014. For more information see PHE's [press release](#).

PHE action plan tackles health inequalities for men who have sex with men

PHE has launched an action plan to address the health and wellbeing inequalities affecting gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (MSM). The plan focuses on three interrelated areas in which MSM are disproportionately burdened with ill-health: sexual health and human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), mental health and in the use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco. For more information see PHE's [press release](#).

Drowning in baths a risk for young children

PHE is alerting parents, carers and health professionals to the dangers of children drowning in baths following a small number of deaths and 'near misses' reported by Child Death Overview Panels in London. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents reports that one in three accidental drowning deaths in young children (those two years or under) involve bath seats. For more information, see PHE's [press release](#).

Avian flu warning for travellers to Asia

A PHE [press release](#) around the Chinese New Year earlier this month reminded travellers going to Asia that avian influenza A (H7N9) is circulating in birds in parts

of China and risk of exposure to the virus can be reduced through simple precautions such as avoiding contact with live poultry or wild birds, avoiding uncooked bird products and practising good hand hygiene. As of 10 February 2015, 571 confirmed cases of human infection with avian influenza A (H7N9) virus have been reported.

Secondhand smoke campaign launch coincides with vote ending smoking in cars with children

PHE launched a campaign earlier this month to highlight the hidden dangers that secondhand smoke in homes and cars can cause to children's health. The launch coincided with the passing by Parliament of regulations to end smoking in cars carrying children in England. The government estimates that three million children in England are exposed to secondhand smoke in their family car, which puts them at risk of serious conditions, including respiratory infections and meningitis and triggering asthma. For more information see PHE's [press release](#).

NHS Health Check: best practice guidance and research priorities

PHE has published an updated version of the NHS Health Check best practice guidance on the [health check website](#). The guidance supports local authorities to deliver the NHS Health Check programme and includes legal requirements and best practice on delivering the risk assessment, awareness and management. Following a consultation on the proposed research priorities for the NHS Health Check programme, PHE has also published an [update](#).

Scarlet fever notifications continue to increase

Increases in scarlet fever are normal at this time of year in the approach to high season between March and April. However, the numbers of cases currently being reported are above what is typical for this time of the year. While this might reflect heightened awareness and improved diagnosis and/or notification practices, the high number of cases currently being notified are of concern. Last year in England over 14,000 cases of scarlet fever were notified, the highest total since the late 1960s. For more information see PHE's [press release](#).

Flu vaccine remains the best protection we have against an unpredictable virus despite low effectiveness this season

New research from PHE has found that the seasonal influenza vaccine has provided low protection this winter against flu infection caused by one particular subtype, H3N2. This is because of a mismatch between the A(H3N2) strain

selected for the vaccine this year and the A(H3N2) strain that has been circulating in the UK this winter. The research, published in [Eurosurveillance](#), found that vaccine effectiveness in preventing laboratory confirmed influenza was estimated to be 3% overall (with an upper 95% confidence interval of 35%). Despite this, flu vaccine remains the best protection we have against an unpredictable virus which can cause severe illness and deaths each year among at-risk groups. In nine out of ten seasons over the past decade the vaccine has provided good to moderate protection against the main circulating strains. For more information see PHE's [press release](#).

PHE stakeholder feedback

Research into how local government, the NHS and the third sector experience working with PHE has been published. The survey, commissioned by PHE from Ipsos MORI, provides a snapshot of stakeholder perceptions of PHE from November and December 2014. It follows baseline research conducted in the 2013 to 2014 year. PHE Chief Executive Duncan Selbie said: 'The findings are very encouraging, with many reporting a further improvement in our working relationship over the last year.' Short and long versions of Ipsos MORI's report and a short video about the results can be found on the [PHE website](#).

New radon map and video published

PHE has published a new and improved [interactive radon map of the UK](#). It enables viewing of the one kilometre grid squares that are most likely to be affected by high levels of the radioactive gas. PHE has also posted a new [video](#) on its YouTube channel explaining what householders can do about radon.

New report highlights variations in routes to diagnosis for gynaecological cancers

The National Cancer Intelligence Network has published a new report titled [Exploring variations in routes to diagnosis for gynaecological cancers, 2006 to 2010](#). It highlights variations in the routes to diagnosis for ovarian, uterine, cervical, vulval or vaginal cancer. Age, deprivation and stage of the disease were major factors in determining whether a cancer was diagnosed through emergency presentation rather than by managed routes like GP referral. Because it is often caught later, survival rates are worse for those diagnosed through emergency presentation.

Guidance on reaching BME communities with important health messaging

The NHS Sickle Cell and Thalassaemia Screening programme has published a [suite of resources](#) following 10 years of experience reaching out to BME communities. Sickle cell disease and thalassaemia are inherited conditions that can affect anyone, however, black and minority ethnic communities are most at risk.

Recent PHE blogs

[A Young Person's Perspective on Public Health](#)

by [Eustace de Sousa](#) (26 January 2015).

[The week at PHE: online highlights, week beginning 26 Jan 2015](#)

by [Blog Editor](#) (1 February 2015).

[London's children](#)

by [Yvonne Doyle](#) (2 February 2015).

[PHE's Ebola response – the people behind the scenes](#)

by [Blog Editor](#) (3 February 2015).

[Improving health equality for gay, bisexual and other MSM – why now and how?](#)

by [Kevin Fenton](#) and [Justin Varney](#) (4 February 2015).

[Are older people with cancer treated differently?](#)

by [Chris Carrigan](#) (4 February 2015).

[What is a 'suspected' Ebola case?](#)

by [Emma Aarons](#) (6 February 2015).

[The week at PHE: online highlights, week beginning 2 February 2015](#)

by [Blog Editor](#) (8 February 2015).

[Partnership working in the North](#)

by [Paul Johnstone](#) and [Jo Whaley](#) (9 February 2015).

[Communities matter for health](#)

by [Kevin Fenton](#) (11 February 2015).

[Public health nursing and midwifery](#)

by [Viv Bennett](#) (12 February 2015).

[The week at PHE: online highlights, week beginning 9 February 2015](#)

by [Blog Editor](#) (13 February 2015).

[A look at health advice for people travelling to major overseas events](#)

by [Brian McCloskey](#), 18 February 2015.

Campaigns news

No smoking day is back on 11 March

PHE are working in partnership with the British Heart Foundation to provide free support tools for those who want to stop. The campaign launches as new research shows that smokers have a 70% increased risk of anxiety and depression when compared with non-smokers. Smokers looking to quit are being encouraged to search [One Day Quit](#) online and make No Smoking Day the day they start to stop.

News from other organisations

Tackling the causes of premature mortality

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has published a [briefing](#) summarising its recommendations for local authorities and other partners on tackling the more direct causes of premature mortality. The briefing focuses on the key actions local government can take on specific lifestyle issues, access to services and preventing unintentional injuries.

Events news

Commissioning for Value event in March

PHE and NHS England are holding five Commissioning for Value events in March, aimed at clinical leads, senior officers CCG commissioning partners and those involved in healthcare public health. Commissioning for Value is a partnership programme between PHE, NHS England and NHS Right Care. For details see the [NHS England website](#).

National Cardiovascular Health Intelligence Network masterclass programme

The network is running a series of cardiovascular masterclasses around the country to explore data, tools and information. The workshops are delivered in partnership with a number of national organisations including the National Diabetes Audit, UK Renal Registry, Sentinel Stroke National Audit Programme, National Institute for Cardiovascular Outcomes Research, PHE and NHS England. The next masterclass is on [19 March in Durham](#).