

[Press release: Invasive species week: Floating pennywort a spreading menace](#)

Minister Geoffrey Boot MHK Isle of Man, Hannah Blythyn AM Wales, Minister Denis Naughten TD Ireland, Lord Gardiner, UK Biosecurity Minister and Deputy Steve Luce, Jersey.

Reports of floating pennywort in our rivers and lakes have reached a record high with 50 tonnes of the invasive plant being removed from the River Thames by the Environment Agency in 2017.

Fast-growing plants like floating pennywort can spread into the wild if they are not properly disposed of when removed from garden ponds ponds. The [Be Plant Wise](#) campaign has handy tips for gardeners on how to prevent this from happening.

Lord Gardiner, the Biosecurity Minister, will see the effects of floating pennywort on Little Britain lake, Hillingdon, and hear about the work being carried out to prevent this plant from spreading further in the River Colne on Monday, 26 March 2018.

He will also see new signs being put up to encourage fishermen and boaters to [Check, Clean, Dry](#) their equipment and clothing to avoid spreading invasive species.

Biosecurity Minister, Lord Gardiner said:

Invasive species pose a real threat to our country's native plants and animals and cost the economy at least £1.8 billion a year.

The Check, Clean, Dry campaign is playing a key role in raising awareness of these threats – helping to prevent new arrivals and stopping the spread of invasive species already here. It is great to see the whole community of river users supporting this programme to protect the future of our precious native species.

As well as following the Check, Clean, Dry advice, people can help by reporting sightings of invasive plants through the [PlantTracker app](#).

Lord Gardiner's visit comes as part of a wider push by government to promote Invasive Species Week. The week is an annual awareness-raising campaign organised by the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat (NNSS) and Defra to get members of the public thinking about simple steps they can take to stop the spread of invasive species which threaten Britain's plants and animals.

Find out more on [non-native species](#).

Below are the themes for Invasive Species Week, which runs until 29 March 2018.

- Monday 26 March – Ornamental plants. [Be Plant Wise](#) and raising awareness of invasive plants.
- Tuesday 27 March – Hitchhikers. Information on the ways that recreational water users, field workers and anyone out in the countryside can help to prevent the spread of INNS, in particular promoting [Check Clean Dry](#).
- Wednesday 28 March – Exotic pets. Owners are asked to make sure they never release pets, or allow them to escape, into the wild.
- Thursday 29 March – #getINNSvolved – on the last day of Invasive Species Week tell us how you are getting #getINNSvolved.

[Statement to Parliament: Motoring agency business plans for 2018 to 2019](#)

I am pleased to announce the publication of the 2018-19 business plans for the Department for Transport's Motoring Agencies:

The business plans set out:

1. the services each agency will deliver and any significant changes they plan to make
2. the resources they require
3. the key performance indicators, by which their performance will be assessed

These plans allow service users and members of the public to assess how the agencies are performing in operating their key services, managing reforms and the agency finances.

The business plans will be available electronically on GOV.UK and copies will be placed in the libraries of both Houses.

[News story: Hepatitis C in the North West report released](#)

Public Health England (PHE) [North West's hepatitis C: 2016 report](#), published today (Monday 26 March 2018), reveals that the number of people infected with hepatitis C has remained stable since 2014. The most recent estimates suggest at least 40,000 people across the North West acquired hepatitis C infection, and of those 27,000 have developed chronic infection.

The report also shows that the number of infected people who have not been diagnosed remains high with an estimated 16,000 out of 40,000 (40%). Many people may be unaware because they have no symptoms or only mild symptoms, but they could be at risk of liver damage as well as passing on the infection to others.

Data shows that the highest burden of disease is in the Greater Manchester area, while Lancashire and Liverpool also have high numbers of people living with hepatitis C.

Those most at risk of contracting hepatitis C infection in the North West are people who inject drugs or have injected drugs in the past – especially if they have shared injecting equipment. They are at increased risk even if they injected only once or twice in the past.

A nationwide survey carried out in 2013 revealed that, in the North West, up to 68% of individuals who inject drugs have hepatitis C infection. People in prison settings also have an increased risk of hepatitis C infection,

Evdokia Dardamissis from PHE North West said:

Hepatitis C remains a major public health concern and one that we are actively addressing in partnership with the NHS and drug services.

The rate of hepatitis C-related mortality and hospital admissions for hepatitis C-related end stage liver disease in the North West is almost twice as high as the rate in England.

However, we are committed to working closely with multiple stakeholders to improve surveillance, diagnosis and care pathways. By increasing public awareness, those people most at risk can take the necessary preventative measures to protect themselves, and those who are already infected can be brought into highly effective treatment programmes.

We encourage anyone who believes that they may be at risk to ask

their GP or drug services to be tested for the virus. This is an infection which can be cured in most people. Simple measures such as using sterile injecting equipment and not sharing personal items like toothbrushes and razors will minimise chances of being exposed to hepatitis C.

Statement to Parliament: Maritime and Coastguard Agency business plan 2018 to 2019

I am proud to announce the publication of the [Maritime and Coastguard Agency's \(MCA\) business plan for 2018 to 2019](#). MCA does vital work to save lives at sea, regulate ship standards and protect the marine environment. The Agency affects not just those working on the coast or at sea, it upholds the legacy of our great maritime nation.

The business plan sets out:

1. the services that the agency will deliver and any significant changes it plans to make
2. the resources the agency requires
3. the key performance indicators, by which its performance will be assessed

This plan allows service users and members of the public to assess how the agency is performing in operating its key services, managing reforms and the agency finances.

The business plan will be available electronically on GOV.UK and copies will be placed in the libraries of both houses.

Press release: Women and girls set to benefit from £15 million Tampon Tax Fund

Thousands of women from across the UK will benefit from £15 million from the latest round of the Tampon Tax Fund, the Minister for Sport and Civil Society

Tracey Crouch announced today.

Projects that tackle sexual violence, address social exclusion among BAME women and improve mental health and wellbeing will receive funding over the next two years. The money will also be used to make grants to smaller organisations so they can deploy services that support the most vulnerable and disadvantaged women and girls in the country.

Tracey Crouch, Minister for Sport and Civil Society, said:

The money generated from sanitary products is being invested in good causes that tackle the serious issues that women of all ages face. It will be used to support vulnerable women and girls and help build a Britain fit for the future.

The ten projects receiving funding from this round of the Tampon Tax are:

[UK Community Foundations](#) £3,400,000 – The Tribewoman project will support vulnerable and excluded women by making onward grants to smaller charities across the UK

[Arhag Housing Association](#) £1,040,000 – The BME Women Hub project will alleviate poverty and social exclusion among women in England

[Brook Young People](#) £1,500,000 – The ‘Let’s Talk. Period.’ project will aim to address period poverty in England.

[Rape Crisis England & Wales](#) £1,400,000 – This digital transformation project is a new approach to tackling sexual violence delivered through member Rape Crisis Centres In England

[Women’s Aid Federation of England](#) £1,509,850 – The ‘Ask Me’ project will improve the community response to domestic abuse across the UK and includes onward grants opportunities

[Hestia Housing and Support](#) £1,000,000 – The ‘Tools for the Job’ pilot project aims to transform the way that employers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland deal with domestic abuse, by improving their HR policies and delivering awareness raising for staff.

[The RCJ & Islington Citizens Advice Bureaux](#) £1,090,488 – The FLOWS project will provide online-tools to improve the capacity of front-line domestic-violence agencies in England to provide legal support to women and children

[Mind](#) £1,785,554 – This project will increase the provision of mental health peer support for women experiencing, and at risk of, mental health problems and includes onward grant programme in England and Wales

[St. Giles Trust](#) £1,077,158 – The ‘Footsteps’ project aims to improve service provision to women in the Criminal Justice System in England with mental health and complex support needs

[One Parent Families Scotland](#) £1,049,590 – This Scotland only project will offer a free support and counselling service for the most disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalised women most in need.

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITORS

1) Over 70 charities are already receiving grants through previous rounds of the fund, with a total of £32m of funding having been announced since Autumn Statement 2015. This latest funding brings the total investment awarded from the Tampon Tax Fund to £47m.

2) The government is committed to continuing the fund until EU rules allow a zero rate of VAT to be applied to women's sanitary products. A decision will be made on the future of the Fund once this has been achieved. Current EU laws prohibits any Member State from applying a new zero rate of VAT. We therefore currently apply the lowest rate we can to these products (5%).