

News story: Automated cleaning of surgical instruments: apply for funding

Surgical instruments and tools including scalpels, forceps and tweezers.

The [NHS in Scotland](#) – supported by the [Can Do Innovation Challenge Fund](#) – has up to £150,000 to invest in studies that look at new ways of automating the pre-cleaning of surgical instruments.

Importance of pre-cleaning

Surgical instruments must be properly cleaned, inspected and sterilised within the sterile services process before each use.

Most existing procedures rely on manual cleaning. This is because current, automated pre-cleaning systems have a limited focus on one specific area, such as neurological surgery. They are also not designed for a range of instruments.

Improvements to automated systems could tackle clinical, health, safety and environmental concerns, improve efficiency and reduce costs.

Solutions must reduce cost and waste

The competition aims to find a solution for automated pre-cleaning that reduces costs and waste, is easy to operate and connects with existing NHS equipment. It must include:

- pre-soaking and internal flushing
- automated chemical dosing
- coarse-contamination removal, ideally ultrasonics or a spray function
- fully programmable pre-cleaning steps
- measurement and monitoring
- integration with automated washers or washer-disinfectors

Funding of £150,000 is for a series of feasibility studies. A further £300,000 could be available in a second phase to develop the most promising ideas.

The competition is being run under SBRI (the Small Business Research Initiative).

Competition information

- the competition opens on 5 March 2018, and the deadline for registration is at midday on 9 May 2018

- it is open to any organisation that can demonstrate a route to market for its idea
 - we expect phase 1 contracts to be worth up to £30,000 and to last up to 6 months
 - successful projects will attract 100% funded development contracts
 - a briefing event will be held on 18 April 2018
-

Press release: PM call with Taoiseach Varadkar: 27 February 2018



A Downing Street spokesperson said:

Yesterday evening the Prime Minister spoke to the Taoiseach on the Brexit negotiations and the situation in Northern Ireland.

The PM reaffirmed our commitment, as set out in the Joint Report, to avoiding a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland or between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom and to converting all of these commitments into legal text in the coming months.

The PM and the Taoiseach both agreed that it was their preference to achieve this through the overall future relationship between the UK and the EU. The PM advised that she would say more on this future relationship in her speech on Friday.

The leaders also discussed the current political situation in Northern Ireland. The Prime Minister said she had met with both Sinn Féin and the DUP last week and that she still believes a basis for accommodation remains. They committed to remain in touch on

this.

Published 27 February 2018

News story: Defence Minister hosts Polish counterpart at Allied Rapid Reaction Corps



Defence Minister Mark Lancaster and Polish Under Secretary of State Tomasz Szatkowski. Crown Copyright.

Following Mr Lancaster's visit to Poland in August 2017, the Polish Under Secretary of State has been in the UK for a two-day visit to discuss plans for the continued close defence relationship between the two countries.

The pair visited the UK's leading contribution to NATO, the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps. The high readiness force staff includes two Polish nationals, as well as UK nationals and personnel from 21 NATO countries.

Minister for the Armed Forces Mark Lancaster said:

Our defence cooperation with Poland continues to go from strength to strength. We recently signed a defence treaty together, only the second such treaty the UK has signed with another EU country, signifying the importance of our relationship. We remain entirely committed to the security of our friends in Europe.

We are allies together in NATO and this visit has shown how our troops work side by side within the alliance to protect our interests.

The UK has deployed 150 military personnel to Poland as part of NATO's

Enhance Forward Presence (eFP) in the region. [Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson visited these troops in December.](#)

As well as visiting the UK's leading NATO high-readiness headquarters, the Defence Minister and his Polish counterpart commemorated veterans at the Polish War Memorial and witnessed a Ground Based Air Defence demonstration at Salisbury Plain. They also held a series of bilateral talks following on from the successful signing of the [new defence treaty in December.](#)

Published 27 February 2018

[**Consultation outcome: The future for food, farming and the environment**](#)

Updated: Summary of responses added.

Leaving the European Union and the Common Agricultural Policy will give us the chance for reform. We want to know your thoughts on the future of agricultural policy in England.

[**Press release: UK Public Health Rapid Support Team deploys to Nigeria**](#)

The UK Public Health Rapid Support Team (UK-PHRST), a joint run effort of Public Health England and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, is deploying to Nigeria to help control an outbreak of Lassa fever.

Nigeria is currently experiencing an unusually severe epidemic of Lassa fever – a viral haemorrhagic illness that is normally present in the country but on a lower scale. The outbreak is most prevalent in the southern Nigerian states of Edo, Ondo and Ebonyi.

Given the size of the current outbreak and the risk of further spread locally, the government of Nigeria has requested support from the UK-PHRST team.

The UK-PHRST team deployment includes an expert in patient management, 2 epidemiologists (experts in tracking outbreaks) and a logistician.

The UK-PHRST will provide technical and analytical support for the public health response to control this outbreak, and will also assist with important research on Lassa fever that can provide insight for controlling the disease in the future.

The team will be working alongside the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control, the World Health Organisation (WHO), and other experts in outbreak control to support the Nigerian government's response.

Professor Daniel Bausch, Director of the UK PHRST said:

The Lassa fever situation in Nigeria has been worsening and now requires an escalated level of response in order to help the Nigerian government slow transmission and save lives.

We are proud to be assisting the government of Nigeria by offering specialist support that will benefit the country both in the immediate and long term.

Public Health Minister Steve Brine MP, said:

Viruses like Lassa fever do not respect borders – and it is only right that we share our expertise with countries facing serious outbreaks around the world.

Our invaluable Rapid Support Team will provide help on the ground in Nigeria to manage the spread of the virus, and grow the country's ability to protect itself from other dangerous diseases.

Humans usually become infected with Lassa virus from exposure to urine or faeces of infected rodents that are unique to Africa. The virus may also be spread between humans through direct contact with the blood, urine, faeces, or other bodily secretions of an infected person, though this tends to be less common. Typical symptoms include fever, sore throat, headache, abdominal pain and diarrhoea, with bleeding and shock in severe cases. The public health risk to the UK is low.

The UK PHRST is funded by the UK government. It continually monitors infectious diseases and other hazards globally, identifying situations where the deployment of specialist expertise could prevent these threats from turning into a global outbreak. It also conducts outbreak-related research and focuses on building in-country capacity to prevent outbreaks with overseas partners.

For latest case numbers of Lassa Fever in Nigeria, please refer to the WHO: <http://www.ncdc.gov.ng/reports/weekly>.

UK-PHRST

UK-PHRST consists of public health experts, scientists, academics and clinicians ready to respond to urgent requests from countries around the world within 48 hours to support them in preventing local disease outbreaks from becoming global epidemics.

Informed by surveillance data, the UK-PHRST deploys on behalf of UK government in response to requests from low- and middle-income countries, as well as with the WHO and the Global Outbreak and Response Network (GOARN).

The UK PHRST has previously deployed members to Ethiopia (outbreak of Acute Watery Diarrhoea), Nigeria (Meningitis outbreak), Sierra Leone (cholera risk), Madagascar (plague outbreak) and Bangladesh (Diphtheria outbreak).

The core team consists of:

- epidemiologists (experts in tracking and understanding disease transmission)
- microbiologists (diagnosing the cause of an outbreak)
- clinical researchers (developing the best patient management practices)
- social scientists (community engagement during outbreaks)
- data scientists (managing data and modelling outbreak trajectories)
- infection prevention and control experts (advising on preventing transmission)
- logisticians

The UK-PHRST consortium of research institutions includes the University of Oxford and King's College London as academic partners.

Public Health England

[Public Health England](#) exists to protect and improve the nation's health and wellbeing, and reduce health inequalities. We do this through world-leading science, knowledge and intelligence, advocacy, partnerships and providing specialist public health services. We are an executive agency of the Department of Health and Social Care, and a distinct organisation with operational autonomy. We provide government, local government, the NHS, Parliament, industry and the public with evidence-based professional, scientific expertise and support. Follow us on Twitter: [@PHE_uk](#) and Facebook: www.facebook.com/PublicHealthEngland.

London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine

The [London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine](#) is a world-leading centre for research and postgraduate education in public and global health, with more than 4,000 students and 1,000 staff working in over 100 countries. The school is one of the highest-rated research institutions in the UK, is among the world's leading schools in public and global health, and was named University of the Year in the Times Higher Education Awards 2016. Our mission is to improve health and health equity in the UK and worldwide; working in partnership to achieve excellence in public and global health research,

education and translation of knowledge into policy and practice.