

# Dr Jenny Harries marks official launch of UK Health Security Agency

Dr Jenny Harries marked her first day as chief executive of the new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) with a visit to Colindale laboratories in North London, accompanied by Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock.

The visit, timed to mark the formal establishment of the UKHSA, focused on the work being done to help the UK understand and respond to new variants of the virus causing COVID-19, and the extensive expertise being deployed to monitor the roll-out of the vaccine programme as well as the ongoing monitoring and surveillance of the infection.

Dr Harries and the Health and Social Care Secretary spoke to the team involved in developing the original test for COVID-19, which began work as soon as reports first emerged from China.

They visited scientists working across vital elements of the pandemic response, including vaccines and serology studies to better understand how many people in the population have antibodies against coronavirus.

They also spoke to the team in the national sequencing service, where whole genome sequencing for COVID-19 takes place in order to detect new variants.

Dr Harries used the visit to highlight her ambition to boost public recognition for the vast amount of work that goes into protecting people's health.

Dr Jenny Harries, Chief Executive, UKHSA said:

It is a significant moment as the work of the UK Health Security Agency begins with a specific focus on pandemics and public health threats. We have learned so much from responding to COVID-19 and this is a brilliant opportunity to ensure these lessons can be applied in the future, with the scale and capacity needed to save lives and protect the public.

Health protection needs to be noisy, be visible, so people are aware of how much work is happening to protect communities.

There is work to do right away as we continue our fight against COVID-19, even with the success of our vaccine programme so far, and the tentative steps we have made on the roadmap to return to normality. The UKHSA will work with our regional, national and global partners to tackle this virus while ensuring we are ready to face future health challenges.

The new agency will work to protect the country from future health threats

and ensure the nation can respond to pandemics quickly and at greater scale.

The laboratories at Colindale, which have been operating throughout the pandemic under Public Health England leadership, will transfer to the new UKHSA.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

This is an important day as we launch the UK Health Security Agency to ensure that we protect the public and prepare for the next pandemic. The team working at UKHSA, expertly led by Dr Jenny Harries, will spend every day focused on the current and future health threats facing our country so we are always ready for whatever is on the horizon.

The primary focus for the UKHSA in its initial phase of operation will be the continued fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.

It will bring together the country's cutting-edge health security science capabilities, data analytics and genomic surveillance with at scale testing and contact tracing capability – combining key elements of Public Health England with NHS Test and Trace including the Joint Biosecurity Centre.

Formally established in April 2021, the UKHSA will be chaired by Ian Peters, currently Chair of Barts Health NHS Trust and former Chief Executive of British Gas, Managing Director of NatWest Small Business Services, and chairman of several data driven growth technology companies.