

Government to review UK approach to future biological security

- UK Biological Security Strategy aims to protect UK from domestic and global biological risks and threats, including emerging infectious diseases and potential biological attacks
- Call for Evidence will ensure refresh uses evidence-based policy and that the best minds in the UK and beyond provide rich insight and challenge

The Government is today (Wednesday 16 February) asking for health and security experts to inform the refresh of the UK's Biological Security Strategy, which aims to protect the country from a range of biological threats, including emerging infectious diseases and potential misuse by hostile actors.

The updated Strategy will incorporate learnings from the recent response to COVID-19, consider evolving priorities since the pandemic, and reflect the rapid advances in science and technology across all aspects of biological security.

The Call for Evidence, [published on gov.uk](#), will seek feedback on specific biological security risks from experts including those with a background in biological engineering, biological security, contingency planning and other related technical fields.

The key areas that will be considered in the refresh include:

- A major health crisis, such as pandemic influenza, non-influenza infectious outbreaks or new infectious disease
- Antimicrobial resistance
- A deliberate biological attack by state or non-state actors
- Animal and plant diseases, which themselves can pose risks to human health
- Accidental release, such as when smallpox and Foot and Mouth escaped from insecure labs, and dual-use research of concern, where life science research is misapplied to do harm

The [Integrated Review](#) published last year set out the vision for the UK's role in the world over the next decade and highlighted the need to review and reinforce the cross-government approach to biological security, including a refresh of the [2018 Strategy](#). This Strategy brought together for the first time the work that takes place across Government to protect the UK from significant biological risks, no matter how these occur and no matter who or what they affect.

Whilst the UK has developed world-leading biological defences, such as public health testing facilities and genomic sequencing capability, the Integrated Review recognises that we must embrace innovation to bring to bear new

biological security capabilities, exploit the opportunities that arise as a result, and build back better, at home and overseas, from COVID-19.

The updated Strategy will be published later this year.

Michael Ellis QC MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General, said:

Ensuring that we are responding to the changing global security landscape and taking reasonable steps to ensure public safety is of critical importance. COVID-19 shone a light on the significance of biological security and ensuring we have robust plans in place to protect the public from threats here in the UK and overseas.

That's why, following the Integrated Review, the Government will be looking into how we are protecting the country and its interests from significant biological risks. This will include considering the evolving priorities since the pandemic and rapid advances in science and technology across all aspects of biological security.

Tackling future challenges effectively requires evidence-based policy and decision-making and a collaborative science base. I urge experts to inform our discussions and provide further insight and best practice to ensure the best minds and talent across the UK are feeding into our Strategy.

The scale and impact of the risks we face require us to strengthen the way we work together, across departments and sectors. We will deliver robust, evidence-based biological security policies and technical solutions that protect the United Kingdom and our overseas interests. I welcome this call for evidence to integrate the expertise across the UK to solve these complex problems.

ENDS

Notes to editors:

- The Call for Evidence is open for six weeks from Wednesday 16 February to Tuesday 29 March. Please visit gov.uk for more information on how to submit your views.
- The refreshed Biological Security Strategy will not affect the COVID-19 public inquiry. Once the terms of reference for the public inquiry have been published in draft, Baroness Hallett, the Chair of the COVID-19 inquiry, will take forward a process of public engagement and consultation.