

New international approach to combat emerging health threats as crucial G7 health talks begin

- UK-hosted G7 health meetings begin in Oxford to unite major democracies to take action on improving global health and tackling COVID-19 around the world
- This comes as a new report demonstrates the impact of G7 on expanding global vaccine access and reducing infectious disease outbreaks in 70 countries

The risk of global pandemics and emerging health threats will be reduced through a new international approach set to be agreed by G7 countries today (Thursday 3 June), that will bolster international collaboration to eliminate potential dangers posed by animals and the environment in the future.

With three-fifths of all infections jumping from animals to humans, the Health and Social Care Secretary, Matt Hancock and G7 health leaders will pledge to work together to improve early identification of animal and environmental health to prevent diseases from spreading.

As the G7 health ministers' meetings begin in Oxford, the UK and its partners will agree to share information on how to detect threats to global health security to identify the drivers of human health emergencies and causal links with animal, plant or environmental factors.

With the world focused on combating COVID-19 and tackling climate change, this collaboration could help bolster scientific understanding of how environmental threats such as marine plastics could be spreading drug-resistant microbes through our oceans, to help fight antimicrobial resistance.

Today and tomorrow, health ministers from the world's leading democracies are convening at Oxford University – the beating heart of scientific brilliance in developing vaccines and world leaders in clinical trials – to agree life-saving action in the critical areas of global health security, clinical trials, antimicrobial resistance, and digital health.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Globally we are only as strong as the weakest link in the health security chain. No one is safe until everyone is safe.

We need to make better use of advances in our ability to collect,

analyse, and share health data from all aspects of life, enabling faster collaboration to respond to health security threats and stop diseases in their tracks.

The UK and our partners in the G7 have a strong track record of working together to support each other and protect the most vulnerable. As I gather with my ministerial counterparts, we have an opportunity to learn from this pandemic to collectively build back better and safeguard our global health security.

As the G7 health ministers' meetings start, the Health Secretary along with the Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab have published a new report on G7 progress to improve global health in developing countries.

The Carbis Bay Progress Report shows that since 2015, G7 members have helped expand access to vaccines, supported developing countries to train, recruit and retain health workers, and assisted more than 70 countries to stop infectious disease outbreaks from spreading.

Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

The report shows that G7 members are working together to supercharge global health security, including recruiting 19,000 'disease detectives' in over 80 countries to help tackle outbreaks before they become epidemics.

Under the UK's presidency, G7 foreign and development ministers committed to supporting COVAX to deliver COVID vaccines globally, reaching 127 countries and territories so far. And the UK is working with the World Health Organization to launch a Global Pandemic Radar to track and share data on COVID variants and new diseases so the world can respond to emerging threats.

Following the Ebola outbreak in West Africa, G7 members committed to working with low- and lower-middle income countries to build stronger health systems.

An example of the progress made is the UK's midwifery programme in Bangladesh, which is helping to reduce maternal and newborn deaths and offering professional employment in rural areas to women. Despite COVID-19, over 4,300 midwives have been trained and almost all are working in rural health facilities, including in Rohingya camps.

The new international approach to preventing pandemics builds on the Prime Minister's recent launch of a new Global Pandemic Radar to identify emerging COVID-19 variants and track new diseases around the world. The pathogen surveillance network will be an international partnership that saves lives and protects health systems by spotting diseases before they cause future pandemics and enabling the rapid development of vaccines, treatments and tests.

The G7 health ministers' meetings in Oxford will take place over 2 days, ahead of the G7 leaders' summit in Cornwall which begins on 11 June. They provide a valuable opportunity to pledge decisive action to safeguard global health, as well as discuss live issues and to engage virtually with the G7 presidency's guest countries: Republic of India, Republic of Korea, Australia and Republic of South Africa.

As with all major events this year, extensive contingencies have been in place to minimise any risks and steps taken to ensure the events are COVID-secure.

The Prime Minister has pledged to use the UK's G7 presidency to work with our global partners to implement a 5-point plan to prevent future pandemics. This includes setting up a worldwide network of zoonotic research hubs to spot a new pandemic before it starts. Zoonotic research centres would be charged with spotting dangerous animal pathogens before they cross the species barrier and infect human beings.

The Carbis Bay Progress Report shows that G7 countries have:

- worked with partners and organisations to increase support for strengthening health systems: in the case of Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance, funding for health system strengthening grew from 21% of total spend in 2016 to 31% in 2019
- steadily increased their financing for health system strengthening, rising from 38% in 2015 of all donor disbursements for general health to 47% in 2019
- mobilised financial and technical support for health systems and the goal of universal health coverage, including to support health workers that are crucial to the daily delivery of essential services
- funded and assisted international mechanisms operated by the World Health Organization and the World Bank that support swift emergency responses in low- and lower-middle income countries during health emergencies, including pandemics
- supported 74 countries to strengthen their implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005), which are the rules that countries must follow to identify disease outbreaks and stop them from spreading