

New UK Health Security Agency to lead response to future health threats

- UK Health Security Agency to lead protection against future health threats
- Deputy Chief Medical Officer, Dr Jenny Harries, to be Chief Executive
- New mission-driven body will harness the UK's public health protection, science, intelligence, testing and delivery expertise

A new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to plan for, prevent and respond to external health threats such as infectious diseases will be led by Dr Jenny Harries, the government has announced today.

The UKHSA – previously the National Institute for Health Protection – will be the UK leader for health security, providing intellectual, scientific and operational leadership at national and local level, as well as on the global stage. It will ensure the nation can respond quickly and at greater scale to deal with pandemics and future threats.

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 capabilities in data analytics and genomic surveillance with scale testing and contact tracing capability – combining key elements of Public Health England with the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC), and NHS Test and Trace.

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.

Dr Harries has previously served on the Joint Committee for Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) and brings a wealth of public health knowledge and expertise gained from working in the NHS and local government at local, regional and national levels. She played central roles in the UK's response to COVID, Ebola, Zika, monkeypox, MERS and the Novichok attacks.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

The UKHSA will be this country's permanent standing capacity to plan, prevent and respond to external threats to health. It will bring together our capabilities from the scientific excellence embodied by the likes of Dr Susan Hopkins and her amazing colleagues in clinical public health, to the extraordinary capability of NHS Test and Trace which Dido Harding has built so effectively over the last 9 months and the JBC.

Dr Jenny Harries brings huge local, regional and national

experience to the role and is perfectly placed to help us not only learn lessons from the COVID-19 response, but to keep us in a state of readiness, primed to respond to infectious diseases and other external health threats.

I want everybody at UKHSA, at all levels, to wake up every day with a zeal to plan for the next pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the world-leading capabilities of the country's public health science, and it has also shown the challenges of protecting the nation's health are changing at an unprecedented pace, as new types of threats emerge.

Dr Jenny Harries, incoming Chief Executive, UKHSA said:

The pandemic has put the UK's health security capabilities in sharp focus and the UKHSA will change the way we approach health protection.

With the creation of the UKHSA, we have an unprecedented opportunity to build on the scientific and operational strength that has been developed, learn from the past and further develop strong bonds with health protection leadership from global to local, to ensure we are ready for the challenges of the future.

The UKHSA will be agile in its responses, maximise the benefits of high-quality data, be relentless in its mission to rapidly identify and respond to new threats, whilst working seamlessly with academia, scientists, industry and local communities.

In starting this important work I want to pay tribute to the commitment and professionalism of all those colleagues who have worked so hard in NHS Test and Trace, in PHE and in the JBC. I look forward to building a diverse, dynamic and dedicated world-leading health security agency with them.

Ian Peters, incoming Chair, UKHSA said:

I'm delighted to be joining UKHSA. We are at a watershed moment in history, dealing with a global pandemic and soon we'll be moving our focus to preventing such health emergencies in future, while playing a key role in reducing health inequalities. The UKHSA will be at the heart of protecting the British people from health threats for decades to come.

I do not underestimate the importance of this role and will lean on my recent years within the NHS, my experience in transforming major companies, and my insights in data-driven technology to ensure the UKHSA fulfils its vital purpose.

Dr Harries will leave her role as Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England in April to become UKHSA Chief Executive. She will take over from current Executive Chair of NHS Test and Trace Baroness Dido Harding after a handover period through April, while PHE's Interim Chief Executive, Michael Brodie, will remain in post to lead delivery of PHE's health improvement and healthcare public health functions and support the transition.

Executive Chair of NHS Test and Trace, Baroness Harding said:

It has been a privilege to serve in the national response against COVID and to establish the scale testing, tracing and analytical capability that makes up NHS Test and Trace and the Joint Biosecurity Centre. I have been inspired by the hard work and dedication every single person has put in since the start of 2020 to constantly improve our fight against the pandemic.

The combination of Public Health England and NHS Test and Trace skills and experience create a strong foundation for the UKHSA to build on so we can continue to respond to the challenges of this pandemic, whilst creating a future in which we stand fully equipped to protect against emerging health threats.

Interim Chief Executive of Public Health England, Michael Brodie said:

I'm extremely proud of the commitment and skill shown by PHE staff in all of their work to protect and improve the nation's health, most recently responding to the pandemic alongside our partners at NHS Test and Trace. Dr Harries now has an exciting opportunity to take our excellent health protection science and expertise in responding to health threats to the next level, through the establishment of the UKHSA.

I look forward to working closely with the organisation over the coming months as we establish a new public health system which builds on our outstanding capabilities across health improvement and health protection and our vital relationships with local government and the NHS.

The Agency will lead on health protection and security activity for England, and will also take over from the PHE and NHS Test and Trace work those organisations already carry out on a UK basis, either as reserved functions or under collaborative arrangements with the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland administrations (for example, the Joint Biosecurity Centre). It will not replace the public health agencies in the other 3 UK countries, but will operate a close collaborative relationship with them.

The UKHSA Board will be announced in due course. The Board will have a key role to play in providing constructive challenge, advice and support to the Chief Executive and the executive team.