

News story: PHE experts to aid recovery on storm hit British overseas territories

Last week the British Virgin Islands, The Turks and Caicos Islands and Anguilla 3 of the 6 UK Overseas Territories in the Caribbean, were severely damaged by Hurricane Irma along with a number of other countries in the region.

Recovery efforts are getting underway, aid is heading to the islands from the UK and now the senior medical and healthcare professionals in the territories will be able to receive help from PHE to restore their public health systems.

Dr Jenny Harries, Deputy Medical Director, said:

From recent work on international health issues, PHE has built strong working relationships with the chief medical officers of the UK Overseas Territories in the Caribbean. Seeing the level of damage inflicted by the recent storms, it is imperative we provide whatever support we can to protect public health on the islands.

Events such as hurricanes can significantly damage public health systems. Our staff will assist those on the ground working hard to protect the islanders from infectious disease and other hazards, which can cause further problems in the aftermath of a natural disaster such as Hurricane Irma.

Health Minister, Steve Brine said:

People in the British Territories have been through a truly traumatic experience and they have the full support of this government as they rebuild their lives.

Experts from Public Health England will share their experience with local health leaders in the region to prevent outbreaks of disease – this will help protect citizens in the critical aftermath and play an important role in restoring communities.

PHE is sending 3 staff who will be available to help develop public health guidance if needed and to provide specialist support to local public health professionals. We have also opened a direct emergency response line for local chief medical officers to access public health advice from doctors in the UK at any time.

The work will involve assessing the risks to public health from the damaged

infrastructure and disruption to health and social services. The plan is to do this by:

- monitoring the spread of infectious diseases which may be circulating
- determining local capacity of laboratories and other services
- ensuring critical vaccination programmes continue to be delivered
- reviewing local mosquito control programmes

The staff going are experts in:

- public health incident management
- disease monitoring
- control of disease vectors such as mosquitoes
- public health system development

It's expected that while in the region they will assist with supporting health protection work and assessing damaged facilities to see what further work would need to be done to protect people both now and in the longer term.