

PM announces plan for 'Global Pandemic Radar'

- Prime Minister announces plan for a new 'Global Pandemic Radar' to identify and track new COVID variants and emerging diseases
- WHO will lead work with the UK, Wellcome Trust other partners and nations to develop an advanced international pathogen surveillance network
- New network builds on UK health security expertise to help stop the spread of COVID-19 and prevent future pandemics

The Prime Minister has today (21 May 2021) launched plans for a new 'Global Pandemic Radar' to identify emerging COVID-19 variants and track new diseases around the world, ahead of the Global Health Summit hosted by Italy and the EU.

The pathogen surveillance network will save lives and protect health systems by spotting diseases before they cause future pandemics and enabling the rapid development of vaccines, treatments and tests.

The Prime Minister spoke to World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Dr Tedros Ghebreyesus and Director of the Wellcome Trust, Jeremy Farrar yesterday (20 May 2021) to agree the next steps ahead of the G7.

WHO will lead an implementation group, supported by the Wellcome Trust, to launch this new international partnership to identify, track and share data on new coronavirus variants and monitor vaccine resistance in populations.

The PM was updated on work already happening in this area, including the newly-opened global WHO Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence based in Berlin. WHO surveillance has also identified the B.1.617 variant, first found in India, in more than 50 countries so far.

The 'Global Pandemic Radar' is expected to be fully up and running with a network of surveillance hubs before the end of 2021, significantly improving global health security going into next year.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said:

Tackling COVID-19 globally and ensuring we are better prepared for future health threats is an absolute priority for the UK's G7 presidency.

The world must never be caught unawares again by a virus spreading among us unchecked. We need to build a system of disease surveillance fit for the 21st century, with real-time data sharing and rapid genomic sequencing and response.

A Global Pandemic Radar will ensure that we are vigilant to new variants and emerging pathogens, and can rapidly develop the vaccines and treatments needed to stop them in their tracks.

The Prime Minister first called for a global network of disease surveillance centres as part of '5 point plan' at the UN Security Council last September.

The UK commissioned a report from the Wellcome Trust and has been working with WHO, other governments' centres of disease control, NGOs and research organisations to take it forward as part of our G7 Presidency.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director General of WHO:

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the vital need for a robust, modern system to keep the world ahead of emerging diseases through active monitoring at the community level, swift and accurate sequencing of new pathogens, and data-sharing across the globe.

The UK has set a strong example for pathogen surveillance and sequencing, as well as vaccine development. I am delighted that under PM Johnson, the UK will partner with WHO to contribute to stronger global surveillance and a safer world.

This announcement follows the publication today of new analysis commissioned by the UK government from Jeremy Farrar, Chair of the Wellcome Trust. The report sets out the mechanisms for a global pathogen surveillance system that can identify new variants of COVID-19 and detect other diseases before they become pandemics.

The work builds on existing surveillance mechanisms and data sharing agreements for HIV, TB and malaria.

Dr Jeremy Farrar, Director of the Wellcome Trust, said:

This pandemic has provided a stark wake-up call to the threat posed by a fast-moving infectious disease. We are long overdue the essential reinforcement of our local, national and international disease surveillance networks.

We failed to address these gaps following other epidemics and we must act now before countries move on from this pandemic. This commitment from the UK, as President of the G7, will be hugely important in achieving these aims. There is no time to spare in making this aspiration a reality.

The Prime Minister will also address the Global Health Summit, convened by G20 President Italy and the European Union, later today [Friday]. The Summit aims to bring countries together to endorse a 'Rome Declaration' of

principles on dealing with global health crises.