

Prime Minister: World must unite to defeat COVID and prevent future pandemics

- The Prime Minister will address the UN General Assembly today [Saturday]
- He will call on world leaders to overcome growing divisions and set out a five-point plan to prevent future pandemics
- The PM will also announce significant new funding to the COVAX vaccines procurement pool and the WHO

The world must overcome the extraordinary divisions created by coronavirus and unite to defeat the pandemic, the Prime Minister will tell the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) today [Saturday].

In his virtual address to the Assembly, Boris Johnson will announce a series of new measures to help lead the world out of the crisis and set out an ambitious five-point plan to prevent future pandemics.

The plan, developed in consultation with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and The Wellcome Trust, starts with a proposal to develop a worldwide network of 'zoonotic hubs' to identify dangerous pathogens before they leap from animals to humans, as COVID-19 is believed to have done.

Other measures include boosting manufacturing capacity for treatments and vaccines, improving pandemic early warning systems, agreeing global protocols for health crises and removing trade barriers.

The Prime Minister will also announce significant new investment in COVAX, the international COVID-19 vaccines procurement pool. The UK will contribute an initial £71 million to secure purchase rights for up to 27 million vaccine doses for the UK population. This complements other initiatives by the Government to procure any coronavirus vaccine that proves to be safe and effective.

Alongside the domestic investment the UK will commit £500 million in aid funding for the COVAX Advance Market Commitment, a facility to help 92 of the world's poorest countries access a coronavirus vaccine. The funding will support developing countries in tackling the virus and help to halt the global spread of the pandemic, keeping us all safer.

As he addresses the UN General Assembly, the Prime Minister will say:

"After nine months of fighting Covid, the very notion of the international community looks tattered.

"We know that we cannot continue in this way. Unless we unite and turn our fire against our common foe, we know that everyone will lose.

“Now is the time therefore – here at what I devoutly hope will be the first and last ever Zoom UNGA – for humanity to reach across borders and repair these ugly rifts.”

“Here in the UK, the birthplace of Edward Jenner who pioneered the world’s first vaccine, we are determined to do everything in our power to work with our friends across the UN to heal those divisions and to heal the world.”

To ensure we are match-fit for other global health crises, the Prime Minister will also announce the UK’s pledge of £340 million over the next four years to the World Health Organization – an increase of 30 per cent from the previous four-year period, making Britain one of the largest donors.

Funding for the WHO will support its vital work in fighting threats to our health worldwide. It will also help to fund an in-depth review into the origins of coronavirus and the implementation of necessary reforms to ensure the WHO is flexible and responsive in future emergencies.

Boris Johnson will pledge to use the UK’s G7 presidency next year to work with our global partners to implement the five-point plan, which represents an innovative new approach to preventing global health crises. The proposals he will make today are:

1) Set up a worldwide network of zoonotic research hubs to spot a new pandemic before it starts. About 60 percent of the pathogens circulating in the human population originated in animals and leapt from one species to the other in a “zoonotic” transmission. Zoonotic research centres would be charged with spotting dangerous animal pathogens before they cross the species barrier and infect human beings.

2) Develop manufacturing capacity for treatments and vaccines. A strong manufacturing capability, in the UK and around the world, will mean tried and tested treatments and vaccines can be held ready to deploy against emerging threats.

3) Design a global pandemic early warning system to predict a coming health crisis. This would require a vast expansion of our ability to collect and analyse samples and distribute the findings, using health data-sharing agreements covering every country.

4) Agree global protocols ready for a future health emergency. In the coronavirus pandemic, countries have fought 193 different campaigns against the same enemy. A common set of protocols, covering everything from information sharing to PPE supplies, would allow us to respond more cohesively and effectively.

5) Reduce the trade barriers which have impeded the coronavirus response. Many countries imposed export controls at the outset of the pandemic, about two thirds of which remain in force. Tariffs on key goods like soap can exceed 30 percent. The UK has committed to lifting tariffs on many COVID-critical products from January 1st.

In addition to addressing global health issues at UNGA, the Prime Minister is

urging international action on climate change and biodiversity. He will address two UNGA events on biodiversity next week.

Notes to editors:

- The Business Secretary Alok Sharma announced we would be joining COVAX on the 18th September
- £500m COVAX AMC funding is in addition to £48m committed during the UK-hosted Global Vaccine Summit, on 4 June 2020.
- With this new funding, the UK is the third largest donor to the WHO – after the US and the Gates Foundation.
- The PM's UNGA speech was pre-recorded in line with other leaders, and will play out at the UN General Assembly at approximately 1500 BST on Saturday 24th September. The transcript and video will be released after broadcast, and broadcasters will be able to take the UN feed live.