

Speech: Chief Medical Officer on the Amesbury nerve agent incident

Two patients are in a critical condition following exposure to the nerve agent Novichok.

Following events in March, we have a well-established response to this type of incident and a clear processes to follow. Our priority at this time is to understand the circumstances surrounding how these 2 individuals became unwell, and to ensure there is no further risk to the public's health from this incident.

As the country's Chief Medical Officer, I want to reassure the public that the risk to the general public remains low. I understand that those in Salisbury and its surrounding areas will be concerned at this news, particularly those who have recently visited the areas now cordoned off by the police.

My advice for any individual that may have been in any of the areas now cordoned off from 10pm on Friday evening onwards is highly precautionary. As before, wash your clothes and wipe down any personal items, shoes and bags with cleansing or baby wipes before disposing of them in the usual way.

This is the same public health advice I gave during the previous incident, a belt and braces approach. I should also warn that the public should be careful, as always, of picking up any unknown or already dangerous objects such as needles and syringes.

You do not need to seek advice from a health professional unless you are experiencing symptoms – any individual who had been significantly exposed at the same time would by now have symptoms. Those people from that area who are concerned that they are experiencing symptoms should call NHS 111.

I also want to highlight, that the areas of Salisbury already cleaned and back in use, like the Maltings, are safe.

I'd like to commend the professionalism of our emergency staff as well as those at Salisbury District Hospital, particularly the intensive care unit.

And I particularly want to reiterate, the police are still investigating how this event happened. The public should continue to follow the advice of the police and that of Public Health England. We will ensure regular updates as we get further information.