

Armed Forces Minister meets UK troops in Estonia

News story

James Heapey spoke with soldiers from the Royal Welsh and 2nd Battalion, the Rifles and met Estonia's newly appointed Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur



Armed Forces Minister James Heapey with Estonian Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur

Armed Forces Minister James Heapey has met UK soldiers protecting NATO's borders during a visit to Estonia, including his old battalion, 2 Rifles.

The minister travelled to Tapa, where more than 1,600 British personnel are based, watching troops train and speaking with servicemen and women.

He also met with Estonia's newly appointed Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur to discuss our joint work to support Ukraine and uphold European security.

Armed Forces Minister James Heapey said:

Every day our friends here in Estonia live with the threat of a belligerent Russia on the other side of their border.

Bilaterally and through NATO, the UK will stand firm with Estonia and I'm proud of the way our troops here stand ready to fight whenever, wherever they are needed.

More than 800 troops from 1st Battalion, the Royal Welsh currently lead a NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) battlegroup in Estonia. The UK also has a second battlegroup of over 800 from 2nd Battalion, the Rifles in the country after deploying them in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

[Defence Secretary Ben Wallace announced in June](#) that the lethality of these

deployments would be enhanced with advanced capabilities including helicopters and artillery systems, as part of an increased UK contribution to NATO. Meanwhile, the UK's existing HQ in Tallinn will be expanded. Led by a Brigadier, it will support the rapid deployment of high readiness forces at the brigade level.

The UK will also support Estonia with training and logistics, the development of its first divisional-level HQ, as well as developing new ways of fighting through their joint hosting of the [Defence Innovation Accelerator for the North Atlantic](#) European HQ, and supporting innovative dual use start-ups through the NATO Innovation Fund.

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[Scottish Secretary Alister Jack comments on 2021-22 GERS figures](#)

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The Government Expenditure & Revenue Scotland figures show the difference between total revenue and total public sector expenditure in Scotland.



Commenting on the Scottish Government's [Government Expenditure & Revenue Scotland figures](#), Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

Today's Scottish Government figures show how people and their families benefit massively from being part of a strong, resilient UK.

Scotland's deficit – the shortfall between taxes raised here, including oil, and public spending – stands at £23.7bn. But as part of the UK, we can rely on the Treasury to step up to support us in plugging the gap.

At a time of unprecedented challenges, sharing resources around the UK has never been more important.

As we continue to recover from the pandemic and confront global pressures on prices and the cost of living, it is clear we need a shared and a relentless focus on boosting the economy.

- Total expenditure for the benefit of Scotland fell from £98,439 million in 2020-21, to £97,502 million in 2021-22.
- The decline in spending reflects a reduction in spending associated with coronavirus support schemes.
- Although spending as a share of GDP has fallen from the peaks seen during 2020-21, it remains above 50% of GDP, and around 5 percentage points higher than prior to the pandemic.
- On top of receiving additional Barnett consequentials for the Scottish Government for 2021-22, these figures account for Scotland having benefited from at least an additional £3.7 billion in reserved spending, down from £9.4 billion in 2020-21.
- The figures from the Scottish Government show that Scotland's notional deficit fell from £35,774 billion in 2020-21 to £23,727 billion in 2021-22. This is more than Scotland's entire health, education, economic development, tourism and culture budget for the year, which was a cumulative £23.4 billion in 2021-22.
- Public expenditure per person in Scotland in 2021-22 was £1,963 higher than the UK average. This was an increase from £1,530 in 2020-21.
- Revenue per person in Scotland remained below the UK average. In 2021-22, including an illustrative geographical share of North Sea revenue, revenue per person was £221 lower than the UK average. In 2020-21 when revenue per head was £395 lower than the UK average. This shows the higher variability when North Sea revenues are included.
- The 'Union dividend' per person in Scotland (the combined value of higher spending and lower revenue) was £2,184 in 2021-22. This was an increase from £1,924 in 2020-21 (revised).
- Although spending on the pandemic fell in 2021-22, this has mostly been offset by increases in the cost of servicing public sector debt.

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[Students told to get up to date with](#)

vaccinations ahead of Freshers' Week

Students heading to university in September are being encouraged to ensure they are up to date with their vaccinations ahead of Freshers' Week to protect themselves against a range of life-threatening illnesses.

First year or returning students can be at increased risk of serious diseases such as meningitis, septicaemia and measles as they mix with large numbers of other students from around the country and overseas.

The UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and meningitis charities are urging parents and students to ensure they are protected before the term begins as many of these illnesses arise at the start of the academic year.

The 3 vaccines students should get up to date with are:

1. MenACWY – protecting against 4 common strains causing meningitis and septicaemia
2. MMR – protecting against measles, mumps, rubella
3. HPV (for female students) – protecting against cervical and other cancers caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV) together with genital warts

Dr Shamez Ladhani, Consultant Epidemiologist at UKHSA, said:

We know that colleges and universities can be hotspots for the spread of diseases such as meningitis and measles.

At the top of any list of essential things to get for college should be any missed vaccines – it could save your life. If unsure check with your GP to make sure that you are up to date with the MenACWY, MMR and HPV vaccinations before term starts.

And all students need to be aware of the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia. Don't assume it's just a hangover or freshers' flu. If you're poorly make sure a friend knows and stay in touch regularly with friends who are ill. These diseases can progress rapidly so urgent action in getting medical attention is critical – call NHS 111 straight away.

Anyone who is unsure about their vaccine status can check with their GP practice to see if they are up to date and fully protected. Ideally, students should have any vaccines they have missed at least 2 weeks before leaving for university. If that's not possible, they should arrange to have any missed vaccines as soon as possible with their current GP or their new GP practice if they are moving to a new university.

The MenACWY vaccine is routinely offered to those in school years 9 and 10 but some students will have missed out. Anyone who has missed out can still

get a free jab with their GP until their 25th birthday.

The vaccine provides high protection against 4 common strains that cause meningococcal disease (meningitis and septicaemia) – MenA, MenC, MenW and MenY – but does not protect against all strains, like MenB.

Although numbers of cases have remained at relatively low levels across the country, there has been a small increase in meningococcal disease due to MenB among young adults (60 confirmed cases in 19 to 22 year-olds during the 2021 to 2022 academic year in England) since the easing of coronavirus (COVID-19) social restrictions in July 2021.

The UK began offering routine vaccination against MenB to infants in 2015, but teenagers and current university students will not have received this vaccine so it is important they are aware of the signs and symptoms of meningitis and septicaemia so they can urgently seek medical care if needed.

Meningitis and septicaemia can develop suddenly. Symptoms include a blotchy rash that doesn't fade when a glass is rolled over it, fever, headache, aching muscles and joints and a stiff neck. The MenW strain can also cause vomiting and diarrhoea in teenagers and young adults. Urgent antibiotic treatment and hospitalisation are critical.

Measles is a highly infectious viral illness that can also have serious consequences. It can be more severe in teenagers and young adults, often leading to hospital admissions. Measles starts with cold-like symptoms and sore red eyes, followed by a high temperature and a red-brown blotchy rash.

Claire Wright, Head of Evidence and Policy at Meningitis Research Foundation, said:

Meningitis can kill healthy people within hours and is difficult to distinguish from a bad hangover or more common milder illnesses in the early stages.

By taking up the free MenACWY vaccine, school leavers are not only protecting themselves but also protecting others by stopping the bacteria from being passed on.

For those who have already been vaccinated it remains important to be aware of the signs and symptoms of meningitis because the free vaccine does not protect against MenB, which is the most common cause of life-threatening meningitis amongst this age group.

Michelle Bresnahan, who founded meningitis awareness charity A Life for a Cure following the sudden death of her son Ryan to MenB, said:

It's important to make sure that getting up to date with your vaccinations is on your to-do list as you begin your preparations for university.

No-one wants to fall ill in the first few months and checking with your GP that you have these 3 vaccines is a quick and easy way to keep yourself safe.

Remember though, not all types of meningococcal disease are covered by the vaccine, including MenB. So it's vital you get to know the signs and symptoms, including a blotchy rash that doesn't fade when a glass is rolled over it, fever, aching muscles and joints and a stiff neck. Doing so could save your life or that of a friend.

Meningitis Now chief executive, Dr Tom Nutt, said:

It's vital that young people take up the opportunity to get vaccinated against MenACWY while at school. In addition, very few young people will have been vaccinated against MenB, which is the strain that causes the most cases of bacterial meningitis in the UK.

Although many young people will have been vaccinated against MenACWY at school, our estimates show that up to half a million under-25s may have missed this important vaccination. If that's you, contact your GP and see if you can get up to date with your vaccinations. This is particularly important if you are going on to higher education and university halls of residence. You can find out more information about the signs and symptoms of meningitis at meningitisnow.org.

Students told to get up to date with vaccinations ahead of Freshers' Week

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