

Press release: PHE offers support to UK vaccine heroes

This [European Immunization Week](#), Chief Executive of Public Health England, Duncan Selbie, reminds all those working in healthcare of the importance of speaking 'confidently about the value of vaccines' and urges everyone to support the vaccine heroes – those GPs and nurses who are on the frontline.

Research from Public Health England shows that health professionals remain the most trusted source of advice on immunisation (93% of parents agreed), while social media and the internet ranked as the least trusted sources of information. Overall, only 9% of parents have seen, read or heard about something that would make them doubt having their child immunised – a historically low proportion and down from a third (33%) in 2002.

Chief Executive at Public Health England, Duncan Selbie said:

In a world where mis-information is so easily spread online we must all speak confidently about the value of vaccines and leave the public in no doubt that they are safe and save lives.

It's testament to our hard-working doctors and nurses that families trust them to provide accurate facts about the effectiveness of vaccines. They're our vaccine heroes and we all have a role in supporting them.

When asked what they had come across in the past year the majority (86%) of parents who reported seeing or hearing information about vaccines said the messages were in support of immunisation. Only 4% said the information was against vaccination.

Of the small number of parents (n=143) who had seen information to make them doubt having their child immunised, 35% had seen this on the internet and 14% mentioned social media as the main source. Information relating to side effects of vaccines was the main topic parents cited that might have persuaded them not to immunise their child.

Head of Immunisations at Public Health England, Dr Mary Ramsay, said:

We are very lucky in England to have one of the most comprehensive programmes in the world and it is really great to see that parents trust our programme and most children are benefiting from this offer.

We know from our history that inaccurate claims about the safety

and effectiveness can lead to doubts about vaccines – putting people at risk of serious illness. It's vital that all websites and social media platforms ensure accurate coverage of public health issues like vaccination.

But, we also know that there are other factors which affect vaccine uptake, such as sending out reminders and making GP appointments as convenient as possible – these things will make the biggest difference in reducing numbers of children not getting vaccinated.

We cannot be complacent, as even small groups of children missing out on or delaying their vaccines leaves them and others vulnerable to serious or even fatal infections.

The survey also shows that reported parental confidence in the immunisation programme is very high and the percentage of parents having all of their child's vaccines done when due is up nearly 20% since 2010 (72%) to an all-time high of 91%. For those parents who didn't vaccinate when due, most had postponed, rather than refused vaccination, with their child going on to have it at a later date.

Vaccine coverage remains high for most childhood vaccines. The latest quarterly data suggests that vaccine coverage at 12 months of age increased by 0.4 to 0.9% for all vaccines compared with the previous quarter. This follows slow declines in uptake since 2012 to 13. According to research by the Royal Society of Public Health, these small drops may be due to timing, availability and location of appointments.

1. A total of 1,674 interviews (households) were achieved among parents of children aged 0 to 4. This included 1,050 parents of 0 to 2 year olds and 1,000 parents of 3 to 4 year olds, which included 376 parents who had a child in both age groups.
2. The latest UK quarterly data and commentary on coverage achieved by the [UK childhood immunisation programme](#) is available.
3. [European Immunization Week \(EIW\)](#), run by the WHO European Region, promotes the core message that immunisation is vital to prevent diseases and protect life. This year, on 24 to 30 April 2019, the campaign aims to raise awareness of the benefits of vaccines and to celebrate the "vaccine heroes" who contribute in so many ways to protecting lives through vaccination.

**[Statement to parliament: Sri Lanka
terror attacks: Foreign Secretary](#)**

statement to the House

Today, the flags in Downing Street and on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are flying at half-mast following the horrific Easter day terrorist attack in Sri Lanka. With your permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to update the House on the attack and the UK Government's response.

On Sunday, multiple terrorist suicide bombings were conducted across Sri Lanka. Six explosions occurred simultaneously—three in churches conducting Easter day services in Colombo, Negombo and Batticaloa, and three more in hotels in Colombo popular with foreign visitors. Information is still coming in, but we know that over 300 people have been killed, and we know that at least eight of those, sadly, are British nationals. They include mother Anita Nicholson with her 14-year-old son Alex and 11-year-old daughter Annabel, teenage brother and sister Amelie and Daniel Linsey, and retired firefighter Bill Harrop with his wife, retired GP Sally Bradley. The whole House will want to pass on our deepest sympathies and condolences, as we digest a truly heartbreaking situation.

I spoke to James Dauris, the British high commissioner in Colombo, earlier this afternoon, and I want to put on record my thanks to him, his team and all the employees of the British Council for their dedication in extremely testing circumstances. One locally employed British Council employee is in hospital with his wife, both with serious injuries, and our thoughts are also with them and their family. Our travel advice has been updated and remains the best source of information for any British nationals or family members who have concerns about the situation.

Yesterday, I spoke to my counterpart, the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister, to express my thanks for the work of the emergency services in Sri Lanka, as well as to pass on our condolences to all the bereaved families. I also discussed what further support the UK might be able to offer. Her Majesty the Queen, the Prince of Wales and other members of the royal family have sent messages of condolence to the President and people of Sri Lanka, and the Prime Minister is expected to speak with Sri Lankan Prime Minister Wickremesinghe later today.

These attacks were a primitive and vile attempt to sow division between people of different faiths. Religious tensions have caused some of the bloodiest battles in human history, and it is sombre and sobering that even in the 21st century attempts continue to set believers of different religions against each other. Our response must be to deny the perpetrators the satisfaction of dividing us by being united in our condemnation of the attacks and united in our support for religious tolerance—surely one of humanity's greatest achievements. Just as after the equally horrific attacks on the two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, we must respond by bringing people together; that is the exact opposite of what the perpetrators intended.

It has to be said that the sheer brutality of the attacks was stark. One pair

of attackers, after detonating their first explosives in a hotel, waited for people to try to escape before detonating a second device. The device destroyed by security services at Colombo airport was most likely designed to target fleeing civilians. The attack was complex, tightly co-ordinated and designed to cause maximum chaos, damage and heartbreak.

The UK will never stand by in the face of such evil. Today, we stand in solidarity with the Government and people of Sri Lanka, who have made enormous strides towards stability and peace following the conclusion of the civil war almost exactly 10 years ago. The Metropolitan Police counter-terrorism command has dispatched a team of specialists to Sri Lanka, including family liaison officers, to support the families of British victims and assist with the repatriation of deceased British nationals. A recent programme run by Interpol involved the training of 30 Sri Lankan forensic specialists and police officers by UK experts in disaster victim identification. We hope that that will be of additional support.

The Government of Sri Lanka have declared a state of emergency as the investigation continues. More than 20 arrests have been made, and there are likely to be more people who were involved in the planning of this attack still at large. A large amount of improvised explosive device material has been recovered, including 87 low-explosive detonators that were recovered from a bus station. There are no verified claims of responsibility as yet. So far, 40 arrests have been made, and counter-terrorism activity continues. The Sri Lankan Prime Minister and President have both said publicly that there will be a thorough investigation into the incident and whether information was handled correctly, and it is important to let that process follow its course.

To attack Christian worshippers at Easter, which is a celebration of peace and the holiest day in the Christian calendar, betrays in the attackers an absence of the most basic values of humanity. Just two days ago, the Prime Minister and I both noted in our Easter messages the dangers facing Christians around the world, 300 of whom are killed every month. In response to such acts, we must redouble our efforts to protect the freedom of religious minorities to practise their faiths, wherever they are. For that reason, the FCO has asked the Bishop of Truro to do an independent report into what more can be done to protect persecuted Christians around the world.

The British Government will continue to give their wholehearted support to the people of Sri Lanka, and I am sure the House will join me in once again expressing our deepest sadness and sympathy to everyone who has been affected by these monstrous attacks.

I commend this statement to the House.

Speech: Justice and care for survivors of sexual violence in conflict

Mr President, Your Excellencies, colleagues, friends. May I firstly extend my heartfelt thanks to Germany, and to you Mr President in particular, for your personal efforts in prioritising discussion on this important issue. The important issue in front of us today: a discussion on conflict related sexual violence, and for gathering such knowledgeable briefers. But I am sure I speak for everyone in this chamber and beyond that our biggest thanks are to our briefers. In particular to those courageous survivors of sexual violence in conflict. Once again Mr President, we have heard compelling testimony that despite considerable momentum that has been built on this very issue since the adoption of Security Council Resolutions 2106 and indeed others. And the launch of the United Kingdom-led preventing sexual violence conflict over seven years ago. There is still so much more to do. And the proposed resolution before us today is a positive contribution to much needed efforts to move the agenda forward. The United Kingdom is supporting the proposed resolution – proposed by Germany – today. Because time after time in this very chamber, as we have heard today, we have heard shocking reports of conflict related sexual violence. And I am sure I speak for everyone in this chamber that we pay tribute to the likes of Nadia Mourad and Inas Moulud – for your brave courage and testimony that you have presented once again today. Sexual violence and the impact of these crimes, that they have on countries, on survivors, on communities, on families, is very clear and it is our responsibility as the Security Council that we respond to this challenge.

The proposed resolution builds on previous resolutions, in developing an integrated, effective, international approach to tackling this grave crime. And there are three elements that I wish to focus on in my contribution. Firstly, the proposed resolution rightly recognises the importance of focusing on survivors need, through a survivor centred approach. A point again articulated by the Secretary-General in its contribution today. We believe this is key to all policies and programmes that aim to meet the needs of survivors of conflict related sexual violence and to avoid putting them at risk of further harm. Secondly, the proposed resolution acknowledges that conflict related sexual violence has a disproportionate impact on women and girls. It encourages support for children born of sexual violence and recognises that sexual violence also affects men and boys. And the United Kingdom believes that survivors' services should cater for all survivors without exception. And welcomes the efforts made in this resolution, Mr President, to promote this very approach. And thirdly, the resolution emphasises the role that civil society plays in efforts to address conflict related sexual violence, including by tackling stigma, as well as the central role in the implementation of broader Women, Peace and Security agenda.

However, the United Kingdom believes more needs to be done. And we regret that the language on services for survivors of sexual violence – recognising the acute need for those services to include comprehensive reproductive and

sexual health care including safe termination of pregnancies – did not meet with all the Council members support. However, Mr President, it is important that we maintain efforts, our consistent efforts, in this respect and we maintain that progress that we have made on this issue including through previous Council resolutions, most notably Council Resolution 2106. Over the last several years, the United Kingdom has spent over £46 million since 2012 on preventing and responding to conflict related sexual violence around the world. And I assure you that as the United Kingdom Prime Minister's Special Representative on this very issue it is a personal priority for me. Our international consultations have informed our efforts to put survivors at the centre of our approach, not only on how we respond to incidents that have already occurred but also as we've heard from our briefers today, on how we importantly prevent them happening again.

We have been pleased to work with like-minded partners and in particular I pay tribute to the close cooperation that we have enjoyed with SRSG Patten and her office, indeed joint visits as we made not so long ago to Iraq. Accountability is key to both response and prevention. First because achieving justice, as we've heard today again is a vital step in helping survivors to repair and rebuild their lives. And secondly because ending impunity, as we heard from Amal Clooney, is an essential deterrent against future violence of this nature. And that is why the United Kingdom is committed to strengthening justice for survivors and holding perpetrators to account. Mr President, this not only means ensuring that international standards and best practices on gathering evidence are upheld, so convictions can be secured., it also means ensuring that survivors are not traumatised all over again. That is why we need to tackle conscious and unconscious bias within criminal justice systems and build the capacity of judges and prosecutors to gain a better understanding to conflict related sexual violence. A priority as illustrated by the testimonies we've heard today from Nadia Mourad and the need to act. We owe it to the survivors. It is therefore why the UK is working with the Institute of International Criminal Investigation and Nadia Murad's Initiative to develop the Murad code. This ethical code of conduct will ensure that survivors give informed consent regarding evidence gathering and that they are referred to support services safely and confidentially.

We want to see the code incorporated into all donor funding requirements and hope that all members will sign up when we launch this code formally at our PSVI international conference scheduled in London in November of this year. However, we should also recognise that for some survivors achieving justice does not necessarily mean going through the formal court system. Which is why we support the Mukwege Foundation and Nadia Murad's Initiative in developing community focus redress for survivors. The UK has recently funded the pilot project in the Democratic Republic of Congo, in this respect. Mr President, we also support Dr Mukwege's plea for a more holistic support for survivors. We therefore endorse the call for Council members to provide more funding to the survivor advocate networks, healthcare professionals and psychosocial services that offer such support – and are making a real difference in the life of survivors on the ground. Mr President, I was going to end my contribution today with a question to the briefers: on how we the

international community can do more to ensure that survivors of sexual violence have access to this holistic support? Yet through their testimonies, we have heard many of the answers today. I would say, in particular, to the testimonies we heard from the survivors and that of Amal Clooney.

And thanking you for providing insights today, let me assure you we will reflect on the contributions you have made. And in doing so I feel proud of the United Kingdom's contribution in first of all in penning and securing unanimous support for Security Council resolutions, which ensured that we held those ISIS perpetrators of these crimes to account. And we stand with the Government of Iraq, we stand with the survivors, we stand with Nadia Murad and others who represent them, such as Amal Clooney. And we support totally the works and efforts of Special Advisor Karim Khan and his team on the ground in Iraq. Mr President, we look forward to their responses, their continued insights, their continued expertise. And most importantly the testimonies of survivors. We should all remain focused on this key priority. It should be the basis of international action in Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict. As we've heard today. Words, yes, are important but words alone do not provide justice and accountability for survivors. It is time to act. And we must do just that.

Thank you.

[Press release: First 'marsquake' captured by UK sensors](#)

The NASA InSight lander, which is supported by the UK Space Agency, has recorded its first likely 'marsquake'. Seismic vibrations of the Martian surface were detected by a set of silicon sensors developed in the UK.

The quiet but distinct signal was detected on 6 April 2019 (the 128th Martian day, or sol, of the mission). The signal was detected by InSight's Seismic Experiment for Interior Structure (SEIS), which the lander placed on the Martian surface on 19 December 2018.

Science Minister Chris Skidmore said:

Detecting these quakes on a planet 140 million miles from Earth is a spectacular feat of science and engineering – a testament to the UK's world leading science and engineering space sector.

This project shows what can be achieved through our flourishing international partnerships and signifies our commitment to the international space sector, creating high skilled jobs across the UK as part of our modern Industrial Strategy.

Sue Horne, Head of Space Exploration at the UK Space Agency, said:

Thanks to the Apollo missions of the 1960's we know that moonquakes exist. So, it's exciting to see the Mars results coming in, now indicating the existence of marsquakes which will lead to a better understanding of what's below the surface of the red planet.

SEIS includes three Short Period sensors (SEIS SP) developed in partnership by Imperial College London, Oxford University and STFC RAL Space, with £4 million in funding from the UK Space Agency. These sensors, carved out of silicon, can detect motion at sub-atomic scales.

Prof Tom Pike of Imperial College London, leading the UK contribution, said:

This is what we what we were all waiting for, the first quivering of the planet picked up by our sensors. We worked hard to develop the most sensitive silicon sensors on Earth to send to Mars as part of SEIS. Up to now we didn't know if even that was going to be good enough.

But it looks like Mars, although very much quieter than Earth, is giving us seismic signals we are able to clearly detect. Our first investigation of the interior of another planet is now underway.

In December, the British-developed silicon sensors of SEIS captured the first sounds ever recorded directly from Mars – a haunting, low rumble caused by vibrations from the wind. Recording this wind allows scientists to separate “noise” from actual marsquakes.

InSight, which landed on 26 November 2018, will study the inside of Mars to learn how planets, moons and meteorites with rocky surfaces, including the Earth and its Moon, formed.

Dr Neil Bowles, from the University of Oxford's Department of Physics, said:

Seeing the first likely 'marsquake' is really exciting and it shows the fantastic performance of the SEIS instrument. We can now start to characterise the types of signals we see on Mars to try and understand how this relates to the structure of planet.

The news of the first recorded marsquake was revealed today (23 April) at the Seismological Society of America conference in Seattle, USA.

Press release: PM call with Sri Lankan PM: 23 April 2019

A Downing Street spokesperson said:

The Prime Minister spoke to Prime Minister Wickremesinghe of Sri Lanka this afternoon.

She began by expressing her deepest condolences following the terrorist attacks that took place in Sri Lanka on Sunday, and conveyed the UK's solidarity with the people of Sri Lanka. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe gave his condolences to the UK following the deaths of British nationals in the attacks.

Prime Minister May offered UK support to Sri Lanka, including sending UK Counter-Terrorism policing experts to provide assistance to authorities in the country.

The leaders discussed the strong connection between the UK and Sri Lanka and the need to stand together in the fight against terrorism. Prime Minister Wickremesinghe expressed his gratitude for the UK's support.