

UKHSA expands support to help countries identify emerging variants

One year on from its launch, the New Variant Assessment Platform (NVAP) will continue expanding its work to other countries and regions worldwide to help global health security efforts.

Nine countries and territories have now received direct support from NVAP to improve early detection of variants, putting the world in a stronger position to respond to newly emerging variants of SARS-CoV-2.

[Set up a year ago](#) and led by the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA), NVAP helps enhance global efforts to combat coronavirus (COVID-19) by giving international access to the UK's world-leading sequencing and virus assessment expertise.

The UK is uniquely positioned to help address global sequencing capability gaps.

The UK total of 2.7 million SARS-CoV-2 genomes uploaded to the international [GISAID](#) database is the largest total of any country after the US, and accounts for approximately a quarter of all sequences uploaded globally.

Through NVAP, UKHSA is already working with:

- Brazil
- Ethiopia
- Kenya
- Nigeria
- Pakistan
- Chile
- Trinidad and Tobago
- The Cayman Islands
- Singapore

NVAP boosts existing capacity and technical expertise on genomic sequencing for countries and territories. It has provided sequencing reagents and kits for many international partners, facilitated scientific exchanges with UKHSA experts and conducted structured training on bioinformatics, characterisation of variants, risk assessment and advice on biological assessment on variants.

The programme is a significant example of the UK's contribution to the World Health Organization's (WHO) global genomic surveillance 10-year plan and works with other international partners to coordinate global efforts on improving genomic sequencing worldwide.

Partnerships with individual countries are bespoke and based on the specific needs of the particular country, whether that be training of scientists, provision of supplies or equipment, expert advice on development of genomic sequencing systems, or arranging for samples to be sequenced in UK

laboratories.

Dame Jenny Harries, Chief Executive of UKHSA said:

It has become increasingly clear that genomic surveillance is vital to help us detect and prepare for new health threats. Improving the world's ability to monitor and detect newly emerging pathogens is critical for global health security.

We are immensely proud of what NVAP has achieved so far and look forward to expanding its reach even further over the coming months and years.

Leena Inamdar, Global Health Lead Consultant at UKHSA and NVAP Programme Lead said:

It is fantastic to see what the New Variant Assessment Platform has achieved over the past year in providing practical support, training and surveillance expertise to so many places.

COVID-19 has taught us that no nation is safe until every nation is safe, and through NVAP we are helping to strengthen surveillance systems across the world. We are excited to continue this work in the next phase of the programme.

Over the coming year, NVAP will continue to work with the WHO Eastern Mediterranean region to improve regional genomic sequencing hubs in Oman, Abu Dhabi and Morocco.

It will also continue to work with WHO South-East Asia, WHO Europe, Africa Centres for Disease Control and the Caribbean Public Health Agency to provide technical assistance, training and procurement of reagents. Further partnerships are in development and will be set out in due course.