

UK and US agree new partnership to fight future pandemics and tackle health inequalities



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Government confirms launch of new Centre for Pandemic Preparedness which will spearhead UK's work to develop a global early warning system to detect new infectious disease threats

UK-US joint commitment to tackling health inequalities reaffirmed as part of levelling up agenda

Announcement comes as President Biden makes his first official visit to the UK

The UK and the US governments have agreed a new landmark partnership between the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the US National Centre for Epidemic Forecasting and Outbreak Analysis, run by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), to turbocharge efforts to combat global pandemics and emerging health threats.

By bolstering disease surveillance, as well as genomic and variant sequencing capacity worldwide, this partnership will accelerate the recovery from COVID-19 around the world and establish an early warning system to detect diseases – which in turn will help low and middle-income countries that do not yet have the same capabilities.

This commitment to prevent the spread of deadly pandemics comes as the leaders of the G7 meet this week to redouble efforts to defeat COVID-19 and build back better from it. Through the UK-US partnership, we will work with global partners including the World Health Organization (WHO) and philanthropic funders, like the Bill and Melinda Gates

Foundation, to develop global capacity for rapid genomic sequencing. This international approach to future pandemics builds on the Prime Minister's recent launch of a new 'Global Pandemic Radar' to identify emerging COVID-19 variants and track new diseases around the world.

As part of the partnership agreed by the 2 allies today, a brand new pathogen surveillance network will help save lives and protect health systems by spotting diseases before they spread, while also helping enable accelerated development of vaccines, treatments and tests.

To build on the UK's global leadership role in health protection, a new Centre for Pandemic Preparedness (CPP) will be established as part of UKHSA. The CPP is set to become a world-leading hub for all aspects of pandemic preparedness, starting with genomic surveillance of human and animal infections in collaboration with a range of scientific and academic partners, that can be shared around the world.

Health and Social Care Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Our brilliant scientists have led the world in sequencing COVID-19 and played a pivotal role as disease detectives who are able to rapidly identify variants.

To send this virus into retreat and stop the advances of future diseases, it is vital the whole world has access to the UK and US's sophisticated surveillance and sequencing technologies.

Through this new landmark partnership with our closest ally, we are sharing our expertise with the world, so together we can unite and take action to prevent the spread of future pandemics to keep people safe everywhere.

The launch follows the UK-hosted G7 Health Ministers' Meeting last week where major democracies agreed a new international approach to combat future health threats by working together to identify early warning signs from animals and the environment.

Included in today's partnership between the US and the UK is a joint commitment to advance clinical trials for vaccines,

therapeutics and diagnostics for infectious disease threats, which will drive forward the principles agreed by the G7.

As part of UKHSA, the CPP will work with partners to monitor emerging and existing pathogens which have the potential to become outbreaks or pandemics. More details on the structure and leadership of the CPP will be set out in due course as part of plans to consolidate the expertise in Public Health England, NHS Test and Trace and the Joint Biosecurity Centre into UKHSA.

UKHSA Chief Executive Jenny Harries said:

Pandemic preparedness is a defining part of our mission at the UK Health Security Agency and this new partnership will ensure we are ably equipped to fight future battles with infectious diseases.

Infectious diseases can spread rapidly across borders, and so it is imperative we build a global pandemic response system that embodies that same quality – protecting us against future health threats and ensuring our expertise is being shared with countries across the globe.

The UK's NHS Race and Health Observatory, supported by NHS England and hosted by the NHS Confederation, was established to identify and tackle the specific health challenges facing people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds. The NHS Race and Health Observatory works to identify and tackle ethnic inequalities in health and care by facilitating research, making health policy recommendations and enabling long-term transformational change. Both the UKHSA and the NHS Race and Health Observatory have key commitments to the sharing of innovative research, practice and learning between communities and across borders.

A partnership between the UK's NHS Race and Health Observatory and the US CDC's Office of Minority Health and Health Equity will be established to strengthen our approach to reducing health inequalities. The partnership between the organisations will promote cooperation and ensure expertise is shared to develop solutions for reducing health inequalities in both countries.

Dr Habib Naqvi, Director of the NHS Race and Health Observatory, said:

Addressing health inequalities is a global challenge that requires a sustained, collaborative and global response. This twinning project is therefore an excellent opportunity for the NHS Race and Health Observatory to build a mutually beneficial and strong collaboration with the Center for Disease Control and Prevention in the US, in addressing our shared ambition of tackling health inequalities and disparities.

We look forward to working with our partner organisation on this exciting and ground-breaking US-UK institution-to-institution relationship. It will provide an exchange framework that shares, supports and facilitates replicable good practice, expertise and practical insight for us to tackle health inequalities in our countries, and to facilitate equitable healthcare for all patients and communities.

The UK government will also work with the Mount Sinai Health System, the Texas Medical Center, and Cedars-Sinai to share best practices, harness new technologies, and identify care delivery models that reduce health disparities.

The UK's New Variant Assessment Programme is already supporting countries who make use of the UK's genomic sequencing technology to spot new variants, providing them with technical support as well as upskilling their scientists with training.

Background information

The US CDC's Office of Minority Health and Health Equity aims to advance health equity and women's health issues across the US through CDC's science and programmes, and increase US CDC's capacity to leverage its diverse workforce and engage stakeholders toward this end.

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