



Department
of Health

*From the Lord O'Shaughnessy
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health (Lords)*

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Dear Colleague,

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My Rt Hon Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care published an article on public health protection on the 18th April, which you may be interested in reading. The text is below:

“The United Kingdom has a proud tradition of ground-breaking public health measures. From Edward Jenner developing the world’s first vaccine in rural Gloucestershire in the 1790s, to the Public Health Acts of the 19th century, to unleashing the potential of new cell and gene therapies in recent years.

“Even today, we lead the world in many areas. Our childhood immunisation programmes are among the best in Europe. We were the first in the EU to introduce standardised packaging for cigarettes and have consistently been rated best in Europe for our tobacco control policies. We have introduced bold measures like the sugar tax to tackle obesity, and our screening programmes to catch disease early are pioneering. We are global leaders in food safety and quality, environmental protection and animal welfare standards. We are proud to lead work in tackling the global threat of antimicrobial resistance, or AMR – having pushed awareness of this threat to the highest political level. Indeed we are driving forward implementation of the Global Action Plan on AMR.

“Countries routinely look to us for advice, support and leadership on a whole range of health issues—like handling disease outbreaks and how to achieve universal health coverage.

“As a member of the EU, we have also influenced and implemented the Directives that help make our food and environment safe and protect our citizens from harm, but our approach has always been to lead not to follow. We are proud to be at the cutting edge of developments in public health – developments that take the minimum standards set by the EU as a starting point to be built on and refined, not as a cap on our ambitions.

“None of this will change as a result of leaving the EU. It would not be in our interests as a nation to abandon the leadership that the world so often looks to us

to provide. Protecting and improving public health is part of our national DNA and our current and future trading partners will expect us to prioritise health.

“In fact, Brexit – while of course presenting challenges – offers some gilt-edged opportunities for public health. For instance, we will no longer be constrained in the information that we can put on food labels to help people make healthy choices. We have already committed to looking closely at the legislation on tobacco control, including on e-cigarettes, to make sure we take opportunities to improve outcomes and protect health. We can be more ambitious for health improvement and public health, not less, when we leave the EU.

“There are concerns that our withdrawal from the EU will somehow mean the dilution of health improvement and protection measures – measures that, in many cases, the UK has itself pioneered. This seems to me both illogical and ill-founded. Britain was a leading force in public health before we joined the European Union and will continue to be long after.

“It is true that we want to find an agreement that allows us to maintain the important and mutually beneficial collaboration with Europe on health issues. Over many years, we’ve worked extremely closely with our EU partners to build the systems and infrastructure in place to protect citizens.

“For example, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control is vital in identifying new threats. The European laboratory surveillance networks are essential in monitoring the spread of diseases across Europe. European Reference Networks ensure healthcare professionals in the UK and across the EU have access to large enough populations to understand rare diseases and share new knowledge. This cooperation has led to many remarkable achievements that have benefited citizens in the UK, Europe and the rest of the world.

“As we’ve seen over the years with emergencies such as Swine Flu and Ebola, health transcends global boundaries and, as the negotiations move forward to agreeing the terms of our future relationship, improving health security will an important part of our negotiating position. I am confident that negotiators in the EU will share our commitment to making sure these health partnerships remain just as strong in the future for the benefit of all.

“Where we can continue working with these institutions after Brexit, we will do so – and I believe we are in a strong position recognising that UK expertise and intelligence has been as valuable to these agencies as their resources are to us. There is much to gain on both sides.

“But, where we are unable to do so, we guarantee that we will apply in the UK standards to protect health equal to or better than those we apply now. This will mean replicating or improving on current systems where that is necessary.



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“There is much at stake in the forthcoming negotiations, but we will not allow our high standards of health improvement, health security, food safety and environmental protection to be compromised in any way. Our guarantee of equivalent or higher standards of health protection and health improvement when we have left the EU is unequivocal.”

As my Rt Hon Friend’s statement shows, this Government is fully committed to maintaining the highest standards of health protection as we leave the EU.

JAMES O'SHAUGHNESSY

