

Statement to Parliament: Home Secretary's update to Parliament on Amesbury incident

With permission Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement updating the House on recent developments in Salisbury and Amesbury.

As I told the House last week, a major incident was declared in Wiltshire on Tuesday, after 2 people were found unwell at a home in Amesbury.

Both were taken to Salisbury District Hospital, where they were treated for exposure to a nerve agent of the type known as Novichok.

This has been identified as the same type of nerve agent that contaminated both Yulia and Sergei Skripal.

Mr Deputy Speaker, it is with profound sadness that I must inform the House that one of the patients – Dawn Sturgess – died last night at Salisbury District Hospital.

I know that the whole House will want to join me in expressing our sincere condolences to her family and her friends.

The police are working to ensure that her family have all the necessary support that they need at this extremely difficult time.

I know that the House will also want to join me in expressing our sincere thanks to the police and the emergency services and to the staff at Salisbury District Hospital for their tireless professionalism and for the dedicated care they provided to Dawn Sturgess and which they continue to provide to Dawn's partner, Charlie Rowley, who remains critically ill in hospital.

I met some of the emergency workers at the weekend and I know just how hard they have worked and how committed they are to doing the best job possible.

Honourable Members may also be aware that a police officer working on the investigation presented at Great Western Hospital and was later transferred to Salisbury District Hospital as a precautionary measure.

I can report to the House that the police officer was not poisoned, did not require treatment and has since left the hospital.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Dawn's death only strengthens our resolve to find out exactly what happened and who is behind it.

Earlier today I chaired a COBR meeting to discuss the next steps, and the Prime Minister and I will continue to receive regular updates about the situation.

This is now a murder investigation which is being led by about 100 detectives from Counter-Terrorism Police Command, alongside officers from Wiltshire police and other constabularies.

We know that the tests conducted at Porton Down have shown that both individuals were exposed to the same type of Novichok used to poison Sergei and Yulia Skripal in March.

Officers are still trying to work out how the pair were exposed to the same nerve agent, although tests have confirmed that they touched a contaminated item with their hands.

The investigation is now moving as quickly as possible to identify what the source of the contamination was.

Police officers have cordoned off a number of sites in Amesbury and Salisbury that they believe the 2 individuals visited in the period before they fell ill.

This is a precautionary measure while the police continue to investigate how they came into contact with the substance.

As I told the House last week, there is no evidence that either person visited any of the sites that were decontaminated following the attempted murders of Sergei and Yulia Skripal.

We have taken a very robust approach to decontamination and all sites reopened following the attempted murders in March are safe.

Last week, the Chief Medical Officer for England said that the risk to the wider public remains low but that people in the local area should not pick up any strange items such as needles, syringes or unusual containers, given the source of the contamination has not yet been found.

This advice remains unchanged.

I have asked the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies to ensure that the advice remains appropriate in light of the news overnight.

Mr Deputy Speaker, this of course is a very upsetting time – not just for Dawn's family, but also for the people of Amesbury and Salisbury who have seen places they know and love cordoned off and become a murder investigation scene.

I would like to reassure them that we are doing everything that we can to keep people safe.

I have also agreed with my colleagues that the Cabinet Office will work across government departments to develop a suitable support package for local businesses. Some of these businesses I met just yesterday. Mr Deputy Speaker, the murder investigation is ongoing and investigators are working urgently and around the clock. This work will take time and the investigation must be allowed to proceed on the evidence and the facts alone. I will keep the House

and the public updated on any significant developments.

I commend this statement to the House.