

[News story: £10 million to develop vaccines against global infectious diseases](#)

The UK government will give £10 million of funding to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to help develop vaccines against emerging infectious diseases.

The £10 million is UK-aid funding that prioritises helping low- and middle-income countries.

CEPI is a global coalition that was formed in response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. The epidemic killed more than 11,000 people.

The importance of CEPI's work is highlighted by outbreaks of emerging infectious diseases seen across the world in the past year, including the ongoing outbreak of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo and outbreaks of Lassa fever in Nigeria and Nipah in India.

Since its launch in 2017, CEPI has received more than \$740 million of funding from governments and charitable organisations around the world.

The £10 million funding is in addition to the UK's investment of £120 million for the [UK Vaccine Network](#) (UKVN). The UKVN helps to develop vaccines and vaccine technology for epidemic diseases.

The UKVN funds 78 research projects that are developing vaccines against diseases that can cause epidemics. The UKVN is prioritising vaccine development for 12 pathogens, 5 of which are also prioritised by CEPI.

The 2 initiatives working together is further shown by the development of a promising new vaccine platform by Imperial College with UKVN support. The platform recently received further [funding from CEPI to progress towards clinical use](#).

This funding from the UK government comes as CEPI celebrates its second anniversary at the World Economic Forum in Davos.

[News story: Lessons start at new £30m education campus](#)

Campus Whitehaven, a £30m education complex, welcomed its first students in

January.

The site is home to state-of-the-art new buildings for St Benedict's secondary school and Mayfield special educational needs school.

Sellafield Ltd invested an original £10m to get the project off the ground, That attracted an additional £20m in funding from other sources.

Jamie Reed, Sellafield Ltd head of corporate affairs, said:

The opening of Campus Whitehaven is a huge moment for our community.

This is the biggest single investment in education in Whitehaven since the 1960s.

Funding for the project came from a range of partners including the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, Copeland Community Fund, and Cumbria County Council.

The site includes new community sports provision, as well as a range of facilities for children with special educational needs including a hydrotherapy pool, a life skills flat, sensory rooms, and an immersive room.

Jamie added:

Sellafield Ltd is tasked with getting the maximum possible value out of our £2bn a year budget.

That means getting the best value for the mission, the nuclear industry, the taxpayer, and our local community.

In my view, a £10m original investment, which unlocks a further £20m to deliver a state-of-the-art educational facility is tremendous value.

Campus Whitehaven will directly help to progress the Sellafield mission and strengthen the local economy.

It will also ensure more of our young people benefit from the opportunities created in the local economy in years to come.

The campus was officially 'handed over' to the 2 schools at a VIP event on 18 January.

An opening event is planned for July.

[Press release: Thames Water to pay £80,000 after sewer blunder](#)

A pollution incident in south-east London has left Thames Water handing over 10s of thousands of pounds to an environmental charity.

After the company allowed sewage to escape from a blocked sewer in 2013, Thames Water will give £80,000 to the South East Rivers Trust to make improvements to a local river. It will also pay the Environment Agency's full costs for the investigation of almost £20,000.

In October 2013, an underground sewer pipe in Chislehurst became lodged with tree roots, fat, oil, grease and other debris. The build-up forced sewage above ground, flooding a field and two streams, before entering the River Shuttle.

Officers from the Environment Agency believe the sewage, which killed as many as 20 stickleback fish and hundreds of invertebrates, could have been flowing for several days. The effect of the pollution on water quality and river habitats was seen over several miles.

Jamie Lloyd, a land and water officer for the Environment Agency in south-east London, said:

A lack of maintenance by Thames Water over an extended period of time was to blame for this incident.

Tree roots were allowed to grow into the sewer unchecked, resulting in fat and sewage solids causing a complete blockage. Sewage backed-up and was sent with some force through two manholes, triggering significant pollution. Thames Water compounded the pollution by failing to clear the sewer quickly after the Environment Agency reported the incident to them.

Following the Environment Agency's investigation, Thames Water installed equipment to monitor sewage levels in its sewer network, near to where the blockage occurred. This will tell them about any developing problems, and allow obstructions to be cleared as soon as possible. The company has also relined the sewer to help prevent roots entering the pipes again.

Thames Water will make the £80,000 payment as a civil sanction, also known as an enforcement undertaking. Companies and individuals can make good some of the environmental damage they cause, including through a financial contribution to a local project. The Environment Agency must also be satisfied the polluter will make changes to its operations to prevent similar

damage in the future.

The South East Rivers Trust, which helps communities look after rivers, will use the money to install a fish pass on the River Cray at Bexley, allowing various types of fish to swim upstream, beyond an historic weir at Hall Place, to the upper reaches of the river.

While agreeing to enforcement undertakings, the Environment Agency continues to prosecute organisations and individuals where evidence shows high levels of culpability and serious environmental harm.

Thames Water has paid the Environment Agency's costs of £18,814.51 for the case.

The Environment Agency urges anyone who spots what they think is pollution to call its free, 24-hour incident hotline: 0800 80 70 60. Officers respond to limit damage to the environment, protecting people and wildlife.

[Press release: Solicitor General refers Croydon 'zombie knife' attacker's case to Court of Appeal](#)



The Solicitor General, Robert Buckland QC MP, has referred Joshua Gardner's original sentence to the Court of Appeal under the Unduly Lenient Sentence Scheme.

Gardner, 18, was sentenced earlier this year in a high-profile case which saw the teen receive a suspended sentence for attempted grievous bodily harm with intent. He was arrested after he wielded a large knife on a busy Croydon street and attempted to use it to break into the victim's car and attack him.

He was sentenced at the Central Criminal Court in November this year, where he was given 2 years imprisonment suspended for 2 years, as well as an unpaid work requirement, curfew order, and a rehabilitation activity.

The appeal hearing will take place on 30 January. The Court may decide to keep the sentence the same, increase it, or issue guidance for future cases.

Speaking about the case, the Solicitor General said:

After carefully considering of the details of this case, I decided to refer the sentence to the Court of Appeal due to the serious nature of the offence concerned.

Gardner took to the streets in broad daylight, terrorising his victim and those members of the public who witnessed this extreme act of violence with a dangerous weapon.

It is now for the Court to decide whether to increase the sentence.

Published 20 December 2018

Last updated 22 January 2019 [+ show all updates](#)

1. 22 January 2019 Court date has now been published
2. 20 December 2018 First published.

[News story: National Drought Group – EA Chairman’s Statement – January 2019](#)

The National Drought Group (NDG) brings together government departments, water companies, environmental groups and others. The role of the group is to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of dry weather, to coordinate action to maintain water supplies, consider water users and protect the environment.

The National Drought Group (NDG) met on Monday 21 January, chaired by Harvey Bradshaw, Executive Director at the Environment Agency, to assess the water resource situation and actions being taken to reduce risk for summer 2019.

CURRENT SITUATION AND PROSPECTS

Wet weather in November and December [2018](#) brought a welcome end to six consecutive months of below average rainfall in England. This winter refill started slightly later than usual but the rain brought relief for many parts of England, with the exception of eastern England.

Despite this improvement and a slightly improved water resources situation compared to this time last year, the picture in England is not yet back to normal.

January has been dry, with just 4% of the expected (long-term average)

rainfall in the first 15 days of the month, resulting in most rivers flows being very low for the time of year. There are still several reservoirs below normal in central England, groundwater in aquifers stretching from Oxford to Cambridge have also not recovered. The [Met Office 3 month outlook](#) shows a slightly higher chance of drier weather than wet during January – March. If the coming months are dry, water available for spray irrigation by farmers may be limited during the summer. If the dry weather continues it will potentially have a significant impact on wetlands and the wildlife they support including returning migratory birds due to an inadequate mix of habitats e.g. mudflat, wet grassland, open water.

The Environment Agency (EA) is taking the following action:

- Moving megalitres of water around, for example since April we have moved 27510 million litres of water in our Ely Ouse to Essex transfer and during January we plan to move a total of 7965 million litres.
- Close monitoring to assess the conditions of rivers affected by sustained low flows and prepare for potential environmental incidents.
- Supporting farmers by updating our position on flexible abstraction for farmers – due to be published in coming weeks – which will include extending the refill season into April for winter storage reservoirs.
- Reviewing guidance for water company drought plans and incorporating lessons learnt over last summer.
- Working flexibly with environmental NGOs and site managers to optimise management of wetland sites to ensure there is enough water on site or providing advice on possible other sources of water

The National Drought Group discussed opportunities to work collaboratively on these actions, the possible implications of further dry weather and how issues from EU Exit may impact on water resources for later in the year.

THE WATER SECTOR

Extreme weather in 2018 – the ‘Beast from the East’ and summer heatwave – put pressure on the sector to test their resilience and drought plans. Following a request at the last NDG meeting, Water UK has reported on the actions the water sector has taken to protect water supplies and reduce longer term drought risk: [Managing water supplies in 2018 and preparing for 2019](#). The Environment Agency and Defra welcomed this activity and clarity.

Most water companies are in a better position than at the start of 2018 but several companies still have reservoirs and/or groundwater below average levels. The companies reassured the NDG they are taking necessary actions such as changing how they operate their sources of water, spending more on tackling leakage, promoting water efficiency and offering additional services to customers such as Southern Water’s free water pipe lagging and Thames Water’s home visits.

Water companies set out specific activities including:

- Yorkshire Water drought permits to give extra flexibility to ensure the company is prepared for the summer.

- Severn Trent Water is considering a drought permit and have been active with their customer communications.
- Anglian Water is working with the EA and the National Farmers Union (NFU) to identify opportunities to share water in the summer.
- United Utilities is embedding learning from the dry weather in 2018 into its operations.

Last year the Environment Agency issued 6 drought permits, reviewing each application to ensure the environment was not put at risk. During the meeting Defra and the Environment Agency urged water companies to act early in making any future applications as a fair assessment of the water needs of people, industry, farmers and the environment takes time – and also because teams are working to prepare for EU Exit.

AGRICULTURE

The National Farmers Union (NFU) has updated members on the dry start to the year and possible risks for the summer. Their main focus has been the East of England as the region has not shown strong signs of recovery yet. The Environment Agency's flexible approach to abstraction for farmers will be updated shortly to include extending the refill season into April for winter storage reservoirs.

The NFU and Environment Agency have run 'abstraction clinics' with farmers in Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire and will be arranging more in the Midlands and other parts of East Anglia during January and February. Advice will also be sent to farmers, updated online and available from the Environment Agency customer contact centre enquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk on 03708 506 506.

CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The NDG cautiously welcomed the recovery of water resources in many parts of England but acknowledged the ongoing dry weather may put pressure on farmers and the environment in the spring.

Water companies were positive that even if the dry weather continues over the coming months, they would not need to introduce any restrictions this summer. Water companies reassured the group that they are not being complacent – they continue to tackle leakage, review their operations and communicate with customers.

In the short to medium term, farmers and the environment face the biggest risks and those involved need to take action now to prepare for what could be a difficult summer.

Through the NDG, members will need to work together to act early and mitigate these risks, the potential challenges from a cold snap and the changes from EU Exit. We encourage sharing and trading of water as a number of members did in 2018.

The NDG will meet again in March 2019.