

Two years to go ...



Welcome to the first edition of HPA London 2012. This newsletter will be produced on a regular basis between now and the start of the Olympic and Paralympic Games so we can keep all of our partners updated on how the HPA is helping to ensure that the Olympics are safe and healthy. To achieve this it is important that the health community works closely together and we hope that this newsletter will help to provide an insight into the role of the HPA and how its partners can work together.

The Olympics in 2012 will be a significant challenge for everyone in health and the emergency services. But I believe they will be something that we will all look back on with pride.

There will be a big job to do in ensuring the Olympics are safe and healthy. The HPA will be monitoring the

public health of both the local population and of the many visitors to the UK who will follow the Olympics. We will be working with many stakeholders to help provide healthcare to visitors, minimise the risk of infectious disease and improve food safety. We will be ready to investigate and respond quickly to any public health threat that might arise and provide information and reassurance to the public, the government and the Olympics organisers.

The HPA will also, of course, continue to provide its normal services around the country. This will require a huge effort from everyone and will make big demands on resources but I know we can do it and we can do it well.

However, I hope that we will also be able to enjoy the Olympics. London will be transformed in 2012, as will many venues and cities across the country. We should absorb the spirit of the Olympics and the many sporting and cultural activities that will take place over that summer so that we feel part of the celebration as well as part of the work – so let's take a deep breath, work hard and enjoy!

Brian McCloskey, HPA national Olympics lead

How will the HPA work to make the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games safe and healthy?

The planning and preparation for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games is an exciting and challenging opportunity for everyone, including all those involved from the HPA.

Before, during and after the Games the HPA will continue to deliver its core business as usual: protecting the public (residents and visitors) from threats to their health from infectious diseases and environmental hazards. However, there is also a specific Olympic commitment to provide a daily public health report to the Games' chief medical officer.

This daily report will show if there are any public health concerns evolving during the Olympics, for example if there is an increase in a particular infection. This information can then be used to protect the local population and visitors to the Olympics by providing them with advice; by investigating the cause of an outbreak and by implementing any necessary measures to protect health. In order to provide this the agency is focusing on reviewing and improving current monitoring systems to ensure we are aware of any problems at the earliest possible opportunity. This will mean that we can

act swiftly to protect the large number of people who will be involved in the Olympics.

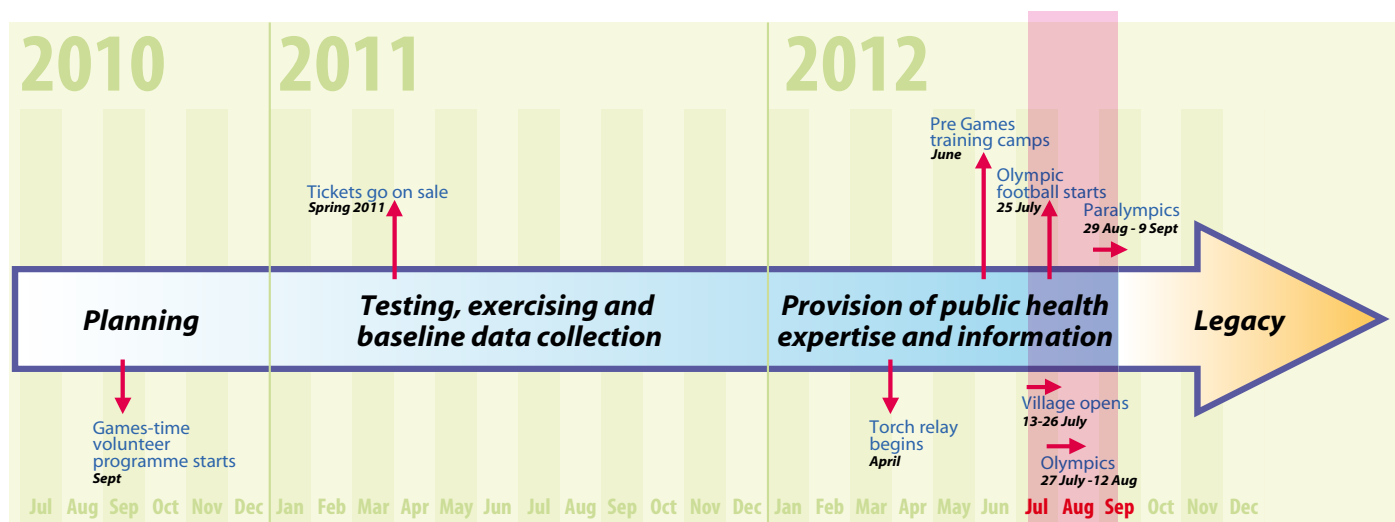
One of the benefits of working on such a large sporting event is that it provides an opportunity to strengthen collaborative working with partner organisations, including the NHS and local authorities. So, a 2012 Public Health Steering Group has been set up, which is jointly chaired by the HPA and NHS London. This group is looking at four main areas: surveillance and reporting, environmental public health, sexual health, and health promotion and prevention.

Although the majority of the events are taking place in and around London it is important to remember that this is a national event and everyone has an opportunity to be involved in something special. This will be especially noticeable over the next couple of years when there will be an increasing number of athletes setting up training camps in the UK and parts of Europe.

If you would like to get in contact with the HPA 2012 programme team with any questions or comments then please email: HPA2012@hpa.org.uk



HPA timeline and key events around the Olympics



Important changes to health protection legislation and the way threats to public health are reported

The cover of a recent edition of the *British Medical Journal* poses the question, 'Major Sporting Events – Will public health ever win?' From a health protection perspective, previous Olympic Games have not seen a surge in rates of infectious disease; however, like any other mass gathering event with people from all over the world, conditions are conducive to the spread of communicable disease. Therefore, it is crucial that our surveillance processes are optimised in time.

On 6 April 2010 new health protection legislation applying to registered medical practitioners (RMPs) in England came into force. Building on the experience of the last three decades, this reinforces the legal requirement on all RMPs to make notifications on the basis of clinical suspicion rather than wait for laboratory confirmation.

In addition, there have been updates to the list of notifiable diseases; to guidance on what data fields should be included in the notification; and suggested timeframes within which notifications should be made: urgently (within 24 hours) or routinely (within three days).

The most significant change is the shift to an 'all hazards approach'. This recognises that aside from the infectious diseases we are aware of; potential threats to human health may also arise following contamination by chemicals, radiological or nuclear substances as well as new and emerging infections that have not yet been characterised. This brings the legislation in line with the International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005).

Once a notification is received, the most time-sensitive use of the information is in taking public health action. This may be through advising the patient of control

measures or undertaking contact tracing and giving preventative medication. Notification data are used to look for clusters or outbreaks and epidemiological links that may not be apparent at the level of a GP practice may become apparent at a sector level. Finally, the information is also used for longer-term planning of services.

It is the reactive aspect of the statutory notification process that is critical in containing public health threats on a daily basis and will be a key part of the public health function during the Olympic Games.

While the coordination of surveillance is through the Health Protection Agency and local authorities, frontline clinicians are the crucial first step in the surveillance pathway. So, in answer to the question, 'Major Sporting Events – Will public health ever win?'...well, from a surveillance perspective, yes...if you are taking part!

Meet the team



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