UK Health Security Agency

LONDON SCHOOL of HYGIENE &TROPICAL MEDICINE

UK Public Health Rapid Support Team: What does it take to be ready to deploy within 48 hours?

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A. Introduction to the UK Public Health Rapid Support Team

The UK-PHRST is an innovative government-academic partnership funded with UK Aid from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and co-led by UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), with a consortium of academic partners.

The team has a novel integrated triple-remit of outbreak response, research and capacity strengthening to prevent and control epidemics of infectious diseases in countries eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA). The team has deployed **26 times to 17 countries** between April 2017 and March 2022.
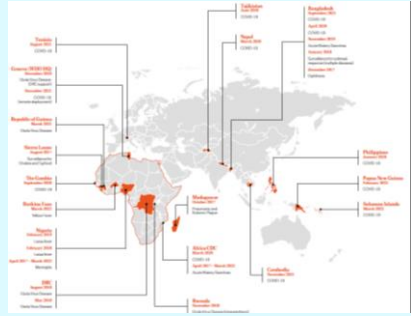

Figure 1: UK-PHRST deployments April 2017 to March 2022.

The UK-PHRST has the following objectives:

a. Support partners in low- and middle income countries (LMICs) to investigate and respond to disease outbreaks rapidly at source.
b. Identify research gaps and deliver rigorous research with partners that improves the evidence base for best practice in disease outbreak prevention, detection, and response in LMICs.
c. Develop in-country capacity for an improved and rapid national response to disease outbreaks.

B. What does it take to create a 'deployment ready' team?

1. **Establish the objectives** of any deployable group and conduct a systematic benchmarking exercise of similar organisations to gain insight into existing practices
2. **Ensure rigorous and transparent recruitment processes** are in place to identify candidates with appropriate technical skill and experience
3. **Consider medical requirements and approval processes** so staff are cleared for overseas deployments and given the support they require in advance
4. **Build strong support services** for staff to access while on the field which include mental health considerations as well as physical and technical support
5. **Develop 'off the shelf' logistics checklists** for supporting all travel requirements
6. **Pre-prepare as much information as possible** so staff can be aware of expectations on and off the field
7. **Engage partners and in-country colleagues** in developing deployment related processes
8. **Establish a feedback system** at the outset to ensure continual evaluation of processes
9. **Listen, learn and respond to all feedback** given on activities
10. **Continually assess and remain agile for changes** to how deployable expertise can be delivered

C. Pre-departure, in the field, and post deployment processes

ONBOARDING STAFF	ACCEPTING A REQUEST TO DEPLOY	PREPARING FOR DEPLOYMENT	IN THE FIELD	AFTER DEPLOYMENT
• **Medical:** assessment, vaccines, emergency kit • **Training:** safety and security, safeguarding • **Logistics:** kit and handbook (covering finance, medical support, incidents, travel, logistics) issued	• **Criteria to deploy:** location, infectious disease agent, prior engagement, threat to further spread (especially cross-borders) • **Approval:** pre-agreed cross-government protocol ensures rapid consideration of any request received	• **Risk assessment:** information pack contains known hazards, risk mitigation, pathogen and country assessments • **Pre-deployment briefing:** Q&A, subject experts, medical advice, logistics and admin support	• **24/7 support:** from UK based team dedicated UKHSA nurse • **Health and safety incidents:** reported and managed through UKHSA systems	• **Post deployment briefing:** what went well and what could have been improved • **Semi-structured discussion:** key operational phases, recommendations for future deployments

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Department of Health & Social Care

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