



**REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN**

August 2017

**Sixty-fourth Session
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INTEGRATED SURVEILLANCE FOR COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Objectives of the event

The objectives of the event are to brief Member States on the:

- current status of communicable disease surveillance in countries, the challenges faced and the progress made;
- importance of integrated disease surveillance in the era of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and for global health security;
- upgrading and modernizing of all surveillance systems for communicable diseases and the role of available electronic platforms, such as DHIS2;
- priority actions for implementation of integrated communicable disease surveillance systems.

Background

The Eastern Mediterranean Region continues to suffer from a significant burden of communicable diseases despite the availability of well proven successful intervention measures. Communicable diseases are currently the second most common cause of mortality in the Region. Establishing strong disease surveillance is critical for effective prevention and control of communicable diseases, as well as early detection of outbreaks and rapid response. In addition, it is critical for the evaluation and monitoring of the impact of various public health interventions for control and elimination of such diseases. Surveillance has been recognized as a core component of the International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) and has been recently closely evaluated in the Region through the conducting of joint external evaluations. Weak surveillance is a threat to health security, at national, regional and global levels.

Despite the importance of surveillance for evidence-based decision-making, disease surveillance systems in many countries in the Region are still weak and are often focused exclusively on disease-specific programme areas. Significant resources have been invested in programmes for diseases that are targeted for elimination and eradication, but have not been used to support a more comprehensive surveillance system at national level. Several countries are facing challenges in establishing surveillance systems, including poor understanding of the integrated disease surveillance concept; fragmentation as surveillance data on communicable diseases are collected by multiple programmes; lack of intersectoral collaboration between different authorities to incorporate needed information; and parallel systems as academic/research institutes may conduct specific surveillance activities while the private sector and nongovernmental organizations may also run surveillance systems in their respective areas of interest.

A framework to introduce an integrated approach in the control of communicable diseases in the Region was presented at the Forty-ninth Regional Committee in 2002 in technical paper EM/RC49/11 but implementation is lagging behind. Additionally, all 22 countries of the Region are signatory to the IHR 2005, which requires all countries to meet the core requirements for surveillance and response needed for implementation. Recently, countries affected by emergencies have implemented early warning systems (DEWS, EWARN) for rapid detection of outbreaks and to inform a response that can be used as a platform for more comprehensive surveillance.

It is increasingly recognized that a more holistic and integrated approach to communicable diseases surveillance is needed in the Region due to limited resources. In most countries improvements in surveillance are usually limited to well-funded categorical disease programmes while certain programmes of high-priority diseases are suffering from a lack of resources. As a result, surveillance systems lack the flexibility to respond to emerging threats. Several problems have been identified in implementing integrated communicable disease surveillance and appropriate solutions need to be sought.

Supporting countries to establish integrated disease surveillance is a priority for WHO in the Region as highlighted in the *Roadmap of WHO's work for the Eastern Mediterranean Region 2017–2021*. In the SDG era, implementing integrated communicable disease surveillance will provide a unique opportunity for multi-disease and multisectoral surveillance and will allow comprehensive monitoring and reporting on SDG indicators related to target 3.3. To achieve this, it is crucial to advocate for integrated surveillance, to emphasize priority-setting for the integration process and working closely with disease-specific programmes to ensure that the integration process will not lead to delays in achieving targets.

Expected outcomes

1. Representatives will be fully briefed on the current status of communicable disease surveillance in Member States, the challenges faced, the progress made and needs anticipated.
2. Agreement on the need for integrated disease surveillance and on upgrading and modernizing all surveillance systems for communicable diseases at all levels making use of available electronic platforms, such as DHIS2.
3. Elicit commitment to establish integrated communicable disease surveillance systems as for countries that have recently undergone a joint external evaluation this can be an important part of the post-evaluation plan.