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BUREAU RÉGIONAL DE LA Méditerranée orientale

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EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRES (EOCS) IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN REGION

Objectives of the event

The objectives of the event are to:

- provide an orientation for Member States on the *WHO Framework for a public health emergency operations centre* and concept of an EOC;
- provide practical guidance on the general policies, planning processes, outcomes and operational procedures necessary to support a viable EOC;
- share the experiences of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education of Islamic Republic of Iran during the emergency floods response in 2019.

Background

A central component of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme is to build efficient partnerships for emergency management and to ensure that these are properly coordinated. The EOC is a forum, both physical and virtual, to coordinate effective and efficient interventions across the emergency management cycle through implementation of standard operating procedures. The EOC can help to provide a common operational picture available through real-time situational awareness and information that supports swift, informed decision-making.

In 2015, WHO published the *Framework for a public health emergency operations centre*, which provides guidance to Member States on establishing or strengthening a functional public health emergency operations centre, or PHEOC. The International Health Regulations (IHR 2005) require that States Parties develop, strengthen and maintain their capacity to respond promptly and effectively to public health risks and public health emergencies and a functional PHEOC is an important component of meeting these requirements. The Framework itself is based on the findings of a series of systematic literature reviews, expert consultations, existing standards of practice, and EOC information systems and related applications.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is prone to natural disasters, including floods, drought and earthquakes. During the floods in April 2019, the Ministry of Health and Medical Education effectively activated its national EOC and deployed emergency medical teams to support the response at subnational level.

Challenges

Experience has shown that a major cause of failed or ineffective responses is the lack of coordination and collaboration among health and other responders. Larger scale and multisectoral public health emergencies require capacities and capabilities not normally found in a health ministry, and which may not be available in the health sector at all. The responsible health authority must therefore work with the national disaster management organizations and other agencies, including international organizations where necessary, to access those capabilities through an emergency response plan. To function properly, the PHEOC must have appropriate plans and procedures in place, reliable and effective information systems, and well-trained staff.

Some of the challenges related to establishing a functional PHEOC may include: lack of coordination between partners resulting in ineffective use of resources, duplication and/or gaps leading to a less-than-optimal response; insufficient training for staff to ensure acquisition of the required knowledge, skills and abilities to develop/maintain a functional PHEOC; a lack of high-level commitment; lack of clarity regarding authority and responsibilities; and inadequate sustainable funding to maintain a functional PHEOC.

Expected outcomes

- Increased awareness of the importance of a national EOC as a forum for coordinating effective and efficient emergency response interventions.
- Increased understanding of the general policies, planning processes, outcomes and operational procedures necessary to support a viable EOC.
- Increased understanding of effective emergency coordination, medical team deployment and disaster risk reduction from the experiences of the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 2019 floods emergency response.