

# DCD Bulletin

Department of Communicable Diseases

## DCD Bulletin

This quarterly bulletin presents important news, events and announcements from programmes of Department of Communicable Diseases in the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean. For details, please contact [dcd@emro.who.int](mailto:dcd@emro.who.int) inserting "DCD Bulletin" in the subject line.

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The emergence of novel coronavirus infection MERS-CoV in September 2012 has raised a global public health alert. The majority of infected patients have required intensive care treatment, and currently, there are no treatment options available to treat patients. Health officials from the Eastern Mediterranean Region, as well as from France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Russian Federation and the United Kingdom (UK), met in Cairo in June to discuss and agree on a collective response plan to counter the threats of novel coronavirus infection to global health. The majority of human infections with MERS-CoV have been reported from the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

## Programme news (HIV, TB, malaria and tropical diseases)

### HIV/AIDS and STIs (HAS)

#### Antiretroviral medicines in low- and middle-income countries: forecasts of global and regional demand for 2012–2015

The global effort to scale up HIV treatment in low- and middle-income countries continues to move closer to the goal of treating 15 million people by 2015. HIV treatment is vitally important as it delays the progression of the disease, improves quality of life and increases life expectancy. However, despite commendable efforts to make antiretroviral therapy (ART) available in all countries of the Eastern Mediterranean Region for almost a decade, in 2011 ART coverage did not exceed 14% – the lowest coverage globally.

While new infections are on the decline globally they continue to increase at a high rate in the Region. With every new infection the number of people living with HIV in need of treatment in future is rising, too. A WHO report entitled "*Antiretroviral medicines in low- and middle-income countries: forecasts of global and regional demand for 2012–2015*" estimates the likely demand for major antiretroviral drugs in the first- and second-line regimens. The forecasts are based on existing trends in countries and resources available from funding agencies and partners. The report can be accessed at: <http://www.who.int/hiv/en/>.

### Stop Tuberculosis (STB)

#### WHO issues interim guidance on the use of bedaquiline to treat multidrug-resistant (MDR)-TB

For the first time in over 40 years, a new TB drug with a novel mechanism of action - bedaquiline - is available, and was granted accelerated approval by the United States Food and Drug Administration in December 2012. There is considerable interest in the potential of this drug to treat MDR-TB. However, information about it remains limited. It has only been through two Phase IIb trials for safety and efficacy. WHO is therefore issuing interim policy guidance to provide advice on the inclusion of bedaquiline in the combination therapy of MDR-TB in accordance with the existing WHO *Guidelines for the programmatic management of drug-resistant TB (2011 update)*.

The interim guidance lists five conditions that must be in place if bedaquiline is used to treat adults with MDR-TB, including effective treatment and monitoring, proper patient inclusion, informed consent, adherence to WHO recommendations, active pharmacovigilance and management of adverse events.

WHO estimates that up to half a million new cases of MDR-TB occur worldwide each year. Current treatment regimens for MDR-TB present many challenges: treatment lasts 20 months or longer, requires daily administration of drugs that are more toxic, less effective, and far more expensive than those used to treat drug-susceptible TB. Globally, less than half of all patients who start MDR-TB therapy are treated successfully.

### Malaria Control and Elimination (MCE)

#### World Malaria Day celebrated across the Region



World Malaria Day was celebrated in the Region, and globally, on 25 April to highlight the need for continued investment and sustained political commitment for malaria prevention and control. The theme of the Day, this year, was "Invest in the future. Defeat malaria".

Malaria is still a major challenge for the Region, as more than 50% of the regional population lives in areas in which there is a risk of contracting malaria. Based on 2010 estimates, about 10.4 million people were affected by malaria, and every year, 15 000 people die of malaria in the Region. A regional ceremony, held in Islamabad, Pakistan, highlighted the problem of malaria in the country. The event was attended by stakeholders, including government officials, WHO, partners and civil society. Pakistan is one of the top three malaria-endemic countries in the Region.

### Rapid assessment of the malaria programme in Pakistan

A rapid assessment of the malaria programme in Pakistan was conducted in Aril. Pakistan is of significant importance for malaria control and prevention efforts in the Region. More than 300 000 confirmed malaria cases and millions of clinically diagnosed cases have been reported in recent years from the country. Pakistan is also becoming a contributing source of imported cases reported in several malaria-free countries and countries targeting malaria elimination in the Region, posing a huge challenge to regional efforts. The rapid review recommended development of strategic plans for malaria control at federal and provincial levels immediately, following the in-depth malaria programme review planned for the end of 2013.

### Twenty-ninth meeting of the Global Fund Board in Sri Lanka

The twenty-ninth meeting of the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and malaria was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 18–19 June. Several countries of the Region participated as part of the regional delegation and contributed to the deliberations of the Board. The meeting reviewed progress on implementation of the new funding model and discussed appointment of a new Inspector General and plans for the upcoming replenishment conference, among other agenda items. Details of the meeting are available at: <http://theglobalfund.org/en/board/meetings/>.

### Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)

#### Sixty-sixth World Health Assembly adopts resolution on all 17 neglected tropical diseases

The World Health Assembly in its sixty-sixth session adopted resolution WHA66.12 on all 17 neglected tropical diseases (NTDs). Representatives from 32 countries and six speakers from nongovernmental organizations took part in the deliberations. Evidence is available which shows that the NTD burden, which affects more than 1000 million people worldwide, can be effectively controlled and, in some cases, diseases can be eliminated or eradicated. The Eastern Mediterranean Region has seen continued progress over the last decade in the fight against NTDs, such as guinea worm, schistosomiasis, lymphatic filariasis, onchocerciasis, leprosy, anthroponotic visceral leishmaniasis and sleeping sickness. WHA resolutions on NTDs are available at: [http://www.who.int/neglected\\_diseases/mediacentre/resolutions/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/neglected_diseases/mediacentre/resolutions/en/index.html)

### WHO records zero cases of dracunculiasis (guinea worm disease)

For the first time since the beginning of the global dracunculiasis eradication campaign, WHO has received no reports of dracunculiasis transmission for an entire month. Although cases are expected to surface, none were reported during the whole month of January 2013 from any of the four remaining endemic countries of Chad, Ethiopia, Mali and South Sudan.

Overall, the number of reported cases has continued to decrease steadily over the past few years, as endemic countries progressively scale up surveillance and case-containment activities. During 2012, 542 cases were reported to WHO, compared with 1058 confirmed cases in 2011, representing a 49% decrease. In 2012, 521 cases were reported from South Sudan, representing 96% of all cases. The Minister of Health of South Sudan says his country is determined to interrupt transmission of dracunculiasis, as the number of reported cases continues to decline. Although South Sudan has been reporting the majority of all cases, progress in implementing eradication measures there over the past two years means the world is on course to defeat the disease by 2015.

## Immunization and Vaccines

### Fourth Vaccination Week celebrated in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

The fourth Vaccination Week was celebrated in the Region in the last week of April. While nearly all Member States participated in celebrating this initiative, 17 Member States implemented various activities focusing on advocacy, education and communication on immunization. The regional launching ceremony for Vaccination Week was held in Egypt on 22 April 2013, under the patronage of H.E. Dr Mohamed Mostafa Hamed, Minister of Health and Population, Egypt. The ceremony took place in the National Training Institute in Cairo attended by more than 300 participants.

This year, the theme for the Week was “Stop Measles Now!”, which called upon stakeholders to increase visibility of the measles elimination target and draw the attention of policy-makers, partners, medical community and the public. The theme is particularly important as all the countries in the Region have set a measles elimination target for 2015.



VPI team at the launching ceremony of the fourth Vaccination Week in the Region

## Immunization and vaccines (cont.)

### Cost-effectiveness of new vaccine introduction

Under the Decade of Vaccine and in line with a WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean resolution, countries in the Region are gradually adding new vaccines to their immunization programmes. Twenty out of twenty-three Member States of the Region have already introduced *Haemophilus influenzae b* (Hib) vaccine, and by the beginning of 2014 all Member States will have introduced it. As new vaccines, such as pneumococcal, rota virus and human papillomavirus are relatively expensive and require additional funding, Member States requested WHO technical support in undertaking cost-effectiveness analysis to generate evidence for decision-makers. The evidence is expected to assist decision-makers in deciding on provision of financial resources for introduction of new vaccines.

WHO, in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization ProVac initiative, has initiated support to Egypt and the Islamic Republic of Iran to undertake cost-effectiveness analysis of introduction of pneumococcal vaccine and rotavirus vaccines. In addition, a cost-effectiveness analysis workshop was also held in June. The workshop was attended by participants from Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria and Tunisia.

### Pentavalent vaccine launched in Somalia

The State House in Mogadishu, the capital of Somalia, hosted the historic launching of pentavalent vaccine in the country. In the ceremony, H.E Hassan Sheikh Mahmoud, President of Somalia, declared his Government's commitment to immunization. The day witnessed the shift from *three-in-one* DTP vaccine to *five-in-one* pentavalent DTP-HepB+Hib vaccine. Somali children will now be able to get a total of eight antigens -pentavalent, BCG, OPV and measles - vaccines, before their first birthday. Government officials thanked WHO, GAVI, UNICEF and partners for supporting introduction of the vaccine. Vaccines are crucial in the equation of child survival and pentavalent introduction marks an important event in Somalia's effort to reduce the unacceptably high number of deaths, disease and disability and move the country closer to achieving the targets of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

### Pooled vaccine procurement initiative in the Region

An intercountry workshop to discuss the establishment of a pooled vaccine procurement system in the Region was held in June in Egypt. The workshop represented a major milestone in fulfilling requests of Member States, expressed in 2011, and 2012 Regional Committee resolutions, to move ahead in the process of establishing a regional procurement system. The initiative is expected to provide a good ex-

ample of regional collaboration and procurement of life-saving vaccines at competitive prices.

## Health Security and Regulations

### Pandemic and Epidemic Diseases

#### Special supplement of *EMHJ* published on novel coronavirus

A special supplement of the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal (*EMHJ*) was published on novel coronavirus in May 2013. The WHO pandemic and epidemic disease programme organized a technical consultative meeting in January 2013 on novel coronavirus, currently known as Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV). The special supplement of the *EMHJ* covers the scientific and technical papers presented at the meeting. A number of papers have been authored and co-authored by staff members of the pandemic and epidemic disease programme. The Journal and links to papers can be accessed at:

<http://www.emro.who.int/emh-journal/eastern-mediterranean-health-journal/home.html>



Training session on data management for influenza and SARI surveillance

#### Regional training course on data management for influenza and SARI surveillance

A number of countries in the Region have established sentinel surveillance system for influenza-like illness (ILI) and severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) with a view to building capacity to detect, diagnose and respond to influenza and other respiratory disease outbreaks. In order to assist influenza data managers establish, maintain and improve influenza surveillance systems and understand how routine surveillance data can be used to early detect an outbreak, a regional training course took place in the Regional Office from 21 to 25 April 2013. Two participants each, working with the influenza/SARI surveillance system in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, occupied Palestinian territory, Oman, Pakistan, Qatar, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia and Yemen participated in the training.

#### Technical missions conducted in Tunisia and Saudi Arabia on novel coronavirus infection

In June, WHO conducted a technical mission in Saudi Arabia to assess the situation due to the emergence of Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV), which first appeared in Saudi Arabia in June 2012. The mission reviewed public health response measures in the country, and concluded that the outbreak had been controlled since the first cases were identified in 2012.



### Pandemic and epidemic diseases (PED) (cont.)

Another team of WHO staff and Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) experts conducted a technical mission in Tunisia from 10 to 14 June 2013 to review the public health response of that country to a recent report of MERS-CoV cluster, and to provide recommendations for further strengthening national preparedness and response. It also aimed to support intersectoral and multidisciplinary collaboration for any possible event in the future.

### Emerging zoonoses: consultations on development of a strategic framework for early detection, diagnosis and control

Emerging infectious diseases that are predominantly of zoonotic origin are increasing in number, frequency and geographic distribution in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. To combat this public health threat, the WHO pandemic and epidemic diseases programme organized two back-to-back consultative meetings on 19–21 March and 11–13 June 2013 in Cairo, Egypt. Representatives from ministries of health, agriculture and animal resources from countries in the Region that are at risk of recurrent outbreaks from emerging zoonoses, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, World Organization of Animal Health, WHO and WHO collaborating centres attended these meetings. An outline of a strategic framework for early detection, diagnosis, prevention and control, developed following these meetings, is currently being finalized.



Participants of guideline development group meeting for radiation emergency management

### Health Risk Management (HRM)

#### Fourth Global Platform (GP) session in Geneva: Oman's success story on emergency risk management

In the fourth GP session "Invest Today for a Safer Tomorrow: Resilient People – Resilient Planet", a case study on Oman received great attention from delegates at a side event organized by the Thematic Platform on Health. The case study presented details on a health initiative which brought together national stakeholders on a common platform to address the country's need for emergency management. The initiative from the Ministry of Health was shown to work as a catalyst to build capacity for health sector emergency risk management, creating multisectoral platform. At the GP, WHO made an official statement expressing organizational commitment to adopt all necessary measures in building capacity to reduce health risks. Over 3500 delegates, from all over the world, attended the session, which was inaugurated by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. More information can be accessed at:

<http://www.un.org/en/events/disasterreductionday/platform.shtml>

### Regional network for emergency preparedness and response meets at WHO

The WHO Regional Office hosted a MENA meeting on the regional network for emergency preparedness and response from in June, in Cairo, in which around 35 regional partners attended. The regional network presented a 'minimum preparedness package' mapping exercise, highlighting the current state of preparedness in six priority countries: Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq and Lebanon. It also highlighted issues and priority actions related to disaster risk reduction, gender-based violence in humanitarian settings and emergency information management systems to address regional needs. Sessions on humanitarian response were facilitated by the emergency and humanitarian response programme.

Based on discussions, action points were drafted to strengthen support to the League of Arab States in emergency management, including to their crisis management centre. On the second day, the MENA disaster risk reduction group held a strategic meeting to discuss the way forward in the context of the regional Arab platform for disaster risk reduction in the Region.

### Guideline development group meets to develop public health guidelines for radiation emergency management

The second meeting of the guidelines development group was hosted by the Regional Centre for Environmental Health Activities (CEHA) from 6 to 8 June 2013 in Amman, Jordan, to develop WHO guidelines on a public health response to radiation emergencies. The global WHO radiation programme of the Health Security and Environment Cluster, Regional Office and CEHA experts worked with 11 group members to evaluate the evidence base and develop recommendations for public health interventions in the case of a radiation emergency.

In his opening remarks, Dr Basel Al-Yousfi, Director, CEHA, reiterated the urgent need for the guidelines to support public health actions in radiation emergencies as one of the Region's priorities in building national core capacities for implementation of the IHR 2005. He expressed appreciation of the efforts at all levels of WHO in supporting this and of CEHA's intention to address gaps. Under the stewardship of the Health Security and Environment Cluster, the new WHO guidelines are planned for publication in mid-2014.



#### **IHR mission to United Arab Emirates**

An IHR advocacy and assessment mission was carried out in the United Arab Emirates in June. The mission aimed to strengthen communication with

the national IHR focal point, raise awareness of stakeholders and assess core capacities for implementation of the IHR, including core capacities relating to points of entry. The mission also provided technical support to national authorities in developing a plan of action to meet the deadline of June 2014 for implementing IHR capacity requirements. The mission met stakeholders, including senior officials at federal, Dubai and Abu Dhabi State levels, associated with health, as well as officials from other ministries and sectors.

#### **Multicountry expert workshop to strengthen capacity requirements for IHR at ground crossings, Turkmenistan**

A multicountry expert workshop to strengthen core capacity requirements for implementation of the IHR at ground crossings was conducted jointly by the Regional Offices for Europe and the Eastern Mediterranean in Turkmenistan in June 2013. The workshop aimed to exchange experiences among neighbouring countries in Central Asia, the Caucasus and WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region on IHR core capacity development at points of entry with a specific focus on ground crossings and to identify additional needs of support.

#### **Laboratory quality management system training workshop and missions**

A four-day training workshop on laboratory quality management systems was conducted in April in Oman. The objective of the workshop was to provide participants with the necessary information, guidelines and assessment tools to establish and strengthen laboratory quality management systems to achieve the highest level of accuracy and reliability in laboratory testing and reporting. Participants from public health laboratories in 12 countries attended the workshop. They were requested to prepare an assessment of their laboratory within one month of the training to identify main areas requiring strengthening and to develop an action plan.

As a follow up to the training, two missions were carried out in Egypt in May 2013, and in Yemen in June 2013, to revise actions taken by the quality team towards establishing a complete and efficient laboratory quality management system and identify the critical steps and needs and to develop an action plan.

#### **National influenza centres in Oman and Islamic Republic of Iran to serve as regional reference laboratories for influenza surveillance in the Region**

Missions were carried out in Muscat, Oman, and the cities of Tehran and Isfahan in the Islamic Republic of Iran in April to assess the competencies and capacities of national influenza centres and explore their potential to serve as regional reference centres for influenza surveillance in the Region. The missions also provided an opportunity to review ongoing collaboration on the regional external quality assessment programme, on the PulseNet-Middle East network of public health and food regulatory agency laboratories, and explore additional opportunities for collaboration.

#### **Activities to strengthen IHR implementation in Egypt**

An assessment was carried out to assess IHR core capacities in two governorates in Egypt and gaps and opportunities for implementation identified. The IHR national focal point conducted meetings with partners, including donors to strengthen collaboration and coordination to gear up IHR implementation in the country. A national workshop was carried out for rapid response teams and surveillance officers in nine governorates to discuss activities needed to enhance surveillance and response capacity requirements. A plan of action has been developed and its implementation is under way.

#### **Activities to strengthen IHR capacity requirements at points of entry in Sudan**

Roles and responsibilities for a national IHR focal point were developed in Sudan prior to the establishment of a national committee of members from the Ministries of Health and Justice to review national legislation. A national committee was also established to develop national guidance for the establishment of event-based surveillance. Various sectors dealing with chemical events attended the meeting to identify gaps in preparedness and response to chemical events and to strengthen coordination. Another meeting was carried out in Red Sea State to strengthen surveillance and response activities at the port and its link with the national surveillance and response system.

#### **Upcoming Events**

##### **World Hepatitis Day, 28 July 2013**

Every year on 28 July, WHO and partners mark World Hepatitis Day to increase awareness and understanding of viral hepatitis. For 2013, the overall theme continues to be "This is hepatitis. Know it. Confront it."

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