

Current major events

Plan rolled out for setting up NICs in the EMR

WHO/EMRO has, recently, rolled out a plan to set up more National Influenza Centres (NICs) in the Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR). Currently there are only eight designated NICs (see the box below) in the WHO-Eastern Mediterranean Region. Many of them are not fully functional. The current plan will support establishment of a National Influenza Centre in each of the twenty-two member states of EMR. As part of the plan a checklist has been prepared and distributed to all the member states of the Region. This tool will be used by the national authorities for preliminary assessment of the existing capacity of national institutions identified to be designated as NIC for laboratory based surveillance on influenza. Following initial assessment by the national health authorities, WHO-EMRO would provide necessary technical support and advice to the intending national institutions for designation as NIC and be recognized as such by the WHO Global Influenza Surveillance Network (GISN).

Editorial note

National Influenza Centres are national institutions designated by national Ministries of Health and recognized by WHO for the purpose of participating in the work of WHO Global Influenza Programme (GIP). To become a NIC, the intending national institutions should express its interest to WHO through national authorities. An assessment of the capacity of the national institution will, then be conducted by the WHO Global Influenza Programme, (GIP) and if found to be qualified, the WHO GIP would formally write to the Ministry of Health, with clearance through the WHO Regional Office, asking the Ministry formally to designate the institution as a National Influenza Centre.. A National Influenza Centre recognized by WHO will maintain direct working relations with the WHO Global Influenza Programme and the WHO Collaborating Centres (WHO CCs) for reference and

Terms of Reference of National Influenza Centres (NICs) .

- Serve as the key point of contact between WHO and the country of origin on all questions relating to virological and epidemiological surveillance of influenza and provision of influenza virus isolates to the WHO GISN;
- Maintain active communication with the members of the WHO GISN through timely submission of viruses, immediate information on isolation of unusual viruses or influenza disease outbreaks and weakly reports of influenza activity during the influenza season;
- Collect appropriate clinical specimens from patients throughout each year and specially during the influenza season for isolates of influenza virus and undertake initial identification of virus type and subtype;
- Alert WHO and/or any of the WHO CCs immediately on the emergence of unusual outbreaks of influenza or influenza-like illness, and /or influenza viruses that can not be readily identified, or other indications of emergence of influenza viruses with pandemic potential;
- Serve as a resource for training on influenza surveillance in the region;
- Serve as the focal point for influenza surveillance system in the member states and provide technical advice and support on collection of epidemiological and virological data on influenza and conduct preliminary characterization of influenza virus.

Designated NICs in the EMR

- Egypt: Egyptian Holding Company for Biological Products and Vaccines (VACSERA)
- Islamic Republic of Iran: School of Public Health, Tehran University of Medical Science;
- Kuwait: Public Health Laboratory, Ministry of Public Health;
- Lebanon: Central Public Health Laboratory;
- Morocco: Laboratoire de virologie, Institut National d'Hygiène;
- Pakistan: National Institute of Health;
- Sudan: Department of Microbiology and Parasitology, University of Khartoum;

research on influenza and will comply with the terms of reference of NIC.

With the emergence of H5N1 and the threat of an human influenza pandemic, it is important that enhanced surveillance for influenza and influenza-like illnesses are established in all the member states of EMR, through the NICs. This will assist to early detect viral antigenic shift and emergence of a novel virus capable of causing a human pandemic. The NICs will guide the annual composition of influenza virus vaccines, and act as a "watchdog" for alerting the global community on the emergence of any novel influenza virus with pandemic potential and any outbreak of unusually severe influenza like illness with rapid spread. The NICs can play a key role in early detection, investigation and containment of any influenza outbreaks including human pandemics.

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Dengue: in Yemen. No update available. **Hepatitis –E:** in Red sea state of Sudan

Current public health events of international concern

[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), CFR %]

Avian influenza

Egypt	[50 (22), 44%]
Indonesia	[135 (110), 81.4%]

Cholera

Uganda	[368 (29), 7.9%]*
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Dengue fever

Yemen	[1001 (?), ?%]
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Marburg

Netherlands	[13(1), 7.7%]
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Hepatitis E

Sudan	[374(24), 6.4%]*
Uganda	[3530(67), 1.9%]

Yellow fever

Cote D'Ivoire	[1 (0), 0%]
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(* = Unofficial figures)
CFR = Case-Fatality Rate