

Current major events

IATA Licensing Workshop on shipping influenza specimens and virus isolates for the EMR countries

The Eastern Mediterranean Region (EMR) has been a focus for outbreaks of Avian Influenza among poultry and humans in 2006 and 2007. National Influenza Centers (NICs) within the EMR and other Central Public Health Laboratories subscribing to the Regional influenza surveillance network, share with Regional Influenza Reference laboratories and other WHO collaborating centers (WHOCC), isolates of seasonal influenza virus. Sharing of viruses is necessary to ensure that vaccine recommended by WHO for the northern hemisphere is also appropriate for people in the EMR. The Regional influenza Network will provide would serve as a reliable source of information for developing possible models of the inter-

country transmission of influenza viruses within the region; to predict how a pandemic virus spreads; and to early detect onset of next pandemic in the EMR should the virus appear in the EMR.

As partial fulfillment of the requirement for implementation of the International Health regulations 2005 (IHR 2005); and in order to strengthen capacities of NICs in the EMR, the WHO Global Influenza Program (GIP) organized a special training on shipping influenza specimens and virus isolates. The training activity was based on the 48th Edition (2007) of the International Air Transport Association (IATA). The objectives of the training activity were to:

1. improve biosafety and biosecurity practices in accordance with IATA regulations,
2. identify current practices in NICs laboratories, available resources and needs; and
3. develop a work plan for safe packaging, transport and shipment of dangerous pathogens

Editorial note

The limited laboratory diagnostic capacities in most countries in the EMR, underscores the need to always have adequately trained cadre to collect, classify, package, mark, labeling and ship virus isolates and or collected specimens to appropriate reference laboratories. This training activity also supports sharing isolated influenza viruses. There is need to review, assess and update current national practices in classification, transport, packaging and shipment and a prepare a costed national action plan with indicators to ensure proper shipment of collected biological specimens to Regional reference laboratories and or WHO collaborating centers according to IATA regulations by:

- i. identifying national responsible authorities for shipment of biological specimens and or viruses.
- ii. identifying gaps and allocating resources to cover these gaps including training and addressing staffing needs
- iii. ensuring presence of a certified shipper within country

- iv. ensuring availability of reasonable amounts of different types of shipment supplies at all times
- v. developing Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for classification, packaging, marking and labeling, transport and shipping of dangerous specimens
- vi. allocating a budget line for shipment of biological specimens; and making use of WHO available funds as appropriate
- vii. conducting at least one simulation exercise on shipment of biological specimens to reveal and resolve unforeseen constraint(s)

The training activity is also appropriate for shipment of other biological specimens during investigations of outbreaks of emerging diseases, other than influenza viruses that could constitute public health emergencies of international concern as indicated in Annex 2 of IHR 2005.

More ...

- The training was conducted by a Temporary Advisor from "World Courier".
- Successful participants in the course were certified as "Shipper of Dangerous Goods Specialization in Infectious Substances - Division 6.2" according to IATA regulations
- GIP has established a shipment fund project that could be used by countries if deemed necessary
- EMRO will hold the next IATA training workshop in September 2008

Update on outbreaks

in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Hepatitis E in Kapoeta, Sudan; **Second Human avian influenza**; NWFP, Pakistan (serologically confirmed); **Thallium poisoning** in Iraq, **Suspected human A/H5N1** in Qatar;

Current public health emergencies of international concern

[cumulative N° of cases/deaths, CFR %]

Avian influenza

China	29/19, 65.5%
Indonesia	[129/105, 81.4%]
Viet Nam	[104/50, 48.1%]

Cholera

D.R. Congo	[31913/98, 3.1%]
Kenya	[169/5, 3.0%]
Iraq	[4,696/ 24, 0.5%]

Plague

DR Congo	[20/5, 25.0%]
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Monkey pox

DR Congo	[173/3, 2.3%]
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Yellow Fever

Brazil	[18/9, 50.0%]
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Hepatitis E

Sudan ^s	[5/3, 60.0%]
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* =Unofficial figures

CFR=Case-Fatality Rate

^s = Number of cases could be more than reported