Current major event

Civil unrest in Syria: Need for an early warning system for outbreaks

The ongoing unrest in Syria has resulted in displacement of people who are currently living in compromised situation with possibly limited access to health care and other public health services. In order to avoid any excess death in the current situation, it is important to establish an early warning system for disease outbreaks that can potentially detect any event early and trigger appropriate response.

Editorial note

The recent civil unrest in Syria has resulted in deterioration of health and medical care services including the routine public health services. Such a situation is often characterized by displacement of large number of people. These circumstances can increase the risk of transmission of communicable diseases and other conditions, and can thus lead to increased mortality (death). Diseases that have a tendency to become epidemic (referred to as epidemic-prone diseases), in particular, can be a major cause of morbidity (disease) and mortality during emergencies. Rapid detection and prompt response to epidemics among the affected population, therefore, remains a priority during humanitarian crises.

EWARN (Early warning and response system for communicable diseases) is an efficient surveillance system for epidemic-prone diseases that allows early detection and timely response to epidemics. The primary objective of an EWARN is to detect and respond rapidly to signals that could indicate outbreaks and clusters of epidemic-prone diseases in humanitarian emergencies. The system uses syndromic surveillance to report suspected cluster of diseases of epidemic potentials or of public health importance using simple data collection tools and generate information for feedback as well as timely and appropriate response. EWARN relies on a network of people responsible for collection, investigation, reporting, analysis and

Steps in notification, verification, investigation and outbreak response in EWARN
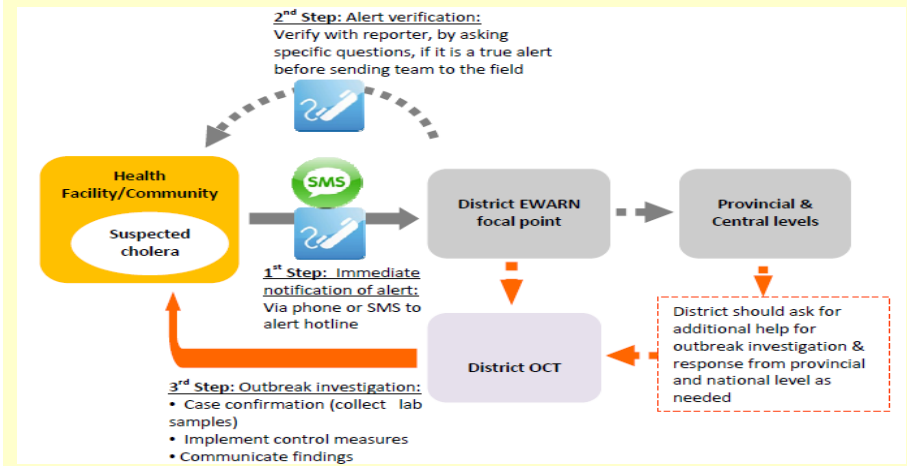
Source: WHO Guideline for EWARN Implementation http://whqlibdoc.who.int/hq/2012/WHO_HSE_GAR_DCE_2012_1_eng.pdf

List of diseases which can be considered for inclusion in the EWARN :

- Acute flaccid paralysis
- Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI)
- Acute Jaundice syndrome;
- Acute watery diarrhea;
- Acute bloody diarrhea
- Acute haemorrhagic fever syndrome;
- Suspected measles;
- Unknown fever;

dissemination of information from the field to the central level

Before setting up the EWARN, it is important to undertake a systematic risk assessment to identify the relatively few epidemic-prone diseases that have the potential to cause the greatest amount of morbidity and mortality in the affected population. To be most effective, EWARN should focus on these high-risk, epidemic-prone diseases *(Please see the box)* only. .

The WHO-EMRO has accumulated vast experience in running EWARN system in countries during emergencies such as in Sudan (Darfur), South Sudan, Pakistan during natural disasters (floods and earthquakes), Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Based on these accumulated experiences, it is expected that EMRO can design an EWARN system for the country that is appropriate for the country and meets its specific needs.

Update on outbreaks
in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Measles in Afghanistan, Somalia, Djibouti and Yemen; **Faulty drug** in Pakistan; **Avian Influenza (H5N1)** in Egypt

Current public health events of international concern
[cumulative N° of cases (deaths), **CFR** %]

Avian influenza	
China	[42(28), **66.7%**]
Egypt	[166 (59), **35.5%**]
Indonesia	[188 (156), **82.9 %**]
Viet Nam	[123(61), **49.5%**]
Cambodia	[19(17), **89.4%**]
Bangladesh	[6(0).]
Global total	[600(353), **58.8%**]
Measles	
Afghanistan	[261 (0)] #
Somalia	[1046 (na), **na%**)]#
Yemen	[3800(124), 3.3**%**] #
Faulty Drug Reaction	
Pakistan	[767(107), **14 %**]*

CFR=Case-Fatality Rate;

 # Suspected cases only

* Hospital visits only