Current major event

Progress made in establishing EWARN for Syrian crisis

WHO's efforts continue to establish an early warning system for diseases outbreaks in the countries affected by the Syrian crisis. While the work continues, significant progress is evident as a number of public health events were timely detected and rapidly responded to resulting in preventing any major outbreak in the region since the crisis unfolded. Over the years, more and more health facilities have started to report using a standardized data collection instrument for EWARN.

Editorial note

Early warning alert and response network (EWARN) is a surveillance system that is usually set up for early detection and response to communicable disease epidemics following humanitarian crisis.

Since the Syrian crisis began in March 2011, an estimated 4 million people from Syria has been displaced internally and a further 5 million people have taken refuge in its neighbouring countries– Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Turkey and Egypt resulting in overstretched health system in these countries. Already dubbed as one of the worst humanitarian crisis and conflicts the world has seen in decades, the situation raised mounting fears for occurrence, and amplification of communicable disease outbreaks. The continuous population movement between Syria and its neighbouring countries also raised fears of introduction and re-introduction of new diseases that were absent in these countries over the years.

With thousands of Syrians crossing the borders each day, the challenge was to rapidly step up epidemic readiness measures in all countries affected by the Syrian crisis so that any major outbreak can be avoided. As the health cluster lead, WHO rapidly established and scaled up the EWARN system in Syria, northern Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon through a coordinated efforts between WHO, the national health authorities of the countries affected by the Syrian crisis, NGOs

Expansion of reporting sites of EWARN in Syria by weeks, October 2012 – February 2014
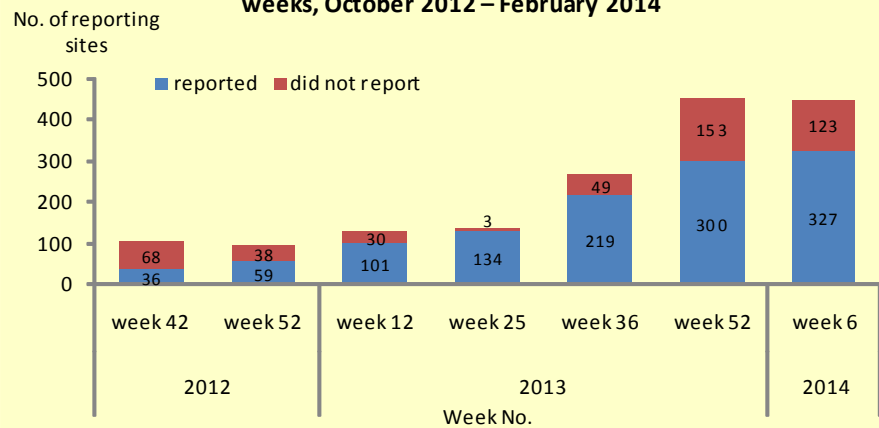
Achievements of EWARN, so far, in detecting unusual health events in the countries affected by the Syrian crisis

- Measles outbreaks in Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon;
- Typhoid fever outbreak in Syria;
- Poliomyelitis outbreak in Syria;
- Acute bloody diarrheal disease outbreak in Syria;
- Hepatitis A outbreak in Iraq and Jordan;
- Increase in deaths from influenza in Syria;
- Upsurge of hepatitis A cases in Syria;
- Unusual increase of Leishmaniasis cases in Lebanon
- Seasonal increase of Brucellosis cases in Syria

and other national and international health partners.

The acceleration of these efforts in establishing EWARN has resulted in early detection and control of a number of public health events *(please see the table above)* in the countries affected by the Syrian crisis. The net result was that any evolving sign of an outbreak was spotted early, control measures were put in place timely and the risk of further spread was avoided. The current challenge for the EWARN would be to sustain the progress made so far in terms of its operational efficiency, maintain and where possible, expand its surveillance coverage. Improving quality of data collection and analysis will be the other big challenge. As another year dawns, it can be expected that the countries will rise to these challenges .

Update on outbreaks
in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

Novel Coronavirus in Saudi Arabia, and UAE,

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

Avian Influenza A (H5N1)	
Egypt	[173 (63), **36.4%**]
Indonesia	[195 (163), **83.6 %**]
Viet Nam	[125 (62), **49.6%**]
Cambodia	[47 (33), **70.2%**]
Global total	[650 (386), **59.4%**]
Novel Coronavirus (MERS-CoV)	
Saudi Arabia	[151 (62), **41%**]
Jordan	[4 (3), **75 %**]
Oman	[3 (3), **100%**]
UAE	[13 (6), **46.1%**]
Kuwait	[2 (0), **0%**]
Tunisia	[1 (0), **0%**]
Qatar	[10 (6), **60%**]
Yellow fever	
Sudan	[49 (15), **32%**]
Crimean-Congo Haemorrhagic Fever	
Pakistan	[100 (20),**20%**]
Wild poliovirus	
Syria	[25 (0)]
Somalia	[194 (0)]

CFR=Case-Fatality Rate; # Suspected cases