

Summary report on the
**Workshop on
strengthening
notification of and
information-sharing
on acute public health
events in the Eastern
Mediterranean Region**

Cairo, Egypt
17–19 October 2023



**World Health
Organization**

Eastern Mediterranean Region

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1. Introduction

A workshop on strengthening notification of and information-sharing on acute public health events in the Eastern Mediterranean Region was held in Cairo, Egypt, on 17–19 October 2023 as follow-up to training conducted in Cairo on 20–21 March 2023 as a part of the Tenth Regional Stakeholders Meeting to Review the Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005). The training in March 2023 was on International Health Regulations (IHR) notification, information-sharing and risk assessment, and was part of the activities of a project to strengthen the notification of and information-sharing on acute public health events to WHO by IHR national focal points (NFPs), launched in August 2022, and implemented by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean in collaboration with the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- identify gaps in the notification of and information-sharing on acute public health events with WHO; and
- make recommendations to improve the mechanism of information-sharing between a country and WHO and between countries.

The workshop targeted IHR NFPs and focal points from WHO country office and served as an alternative to the supportive supervision visits originally planned within the project to all countries and territories of the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Participants included the NFPs of Afghanistan, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, and WHO country office staff from Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Oman, Somalia and Yemen. Participants from Lebanon, the occupied Palestinian territory and the Syrian Arab Republic were unable to attend due to the political situation at the time.

The workshop's methodology included presentations, plenary discussions, focus group discussions and a tabletop exercise.

2. Summary of discussions

The workshop reflected the fundamental importance of collaboration and partnership between NFPs and WHO in the context of the IHR (2005), which serve as a powerful instrument to guide and enable collective efforts for the early detection of, and response to, public health threats of international concern. Central to this is enhancing notification and information-sharing between Member States and WHO.

Challenges

The key performance indicators of the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean/CDC project covering quarter 4 of 2022 to the end of quarter 3 2023 show that:

- only seven out of 37 events created by WHO were notified by NFPs, which indicates a need to improve health event notification by countries in the Region;
- of the 12 notifications received, only seven (58%) fulfilled the criteria to notify WHO, suggesting that more efforts are needed to align notification practices with the established criteria;
- timely responses were received for 19 (38%) of 50 verification requests sent by WHO, indicating that under half of the verification requests were responded to promptly.

Furthermore, the ongoing conflicts in the Region are hampering the possibility of some countries keeping in constant communication with WHO and attending training. Moreover, the absence of an NFP position is an issue in some countries where de facto authorities exist (for example, in Afghanistan and north Yemen).

3. Conclusions

- A significant amount of time has passed since the NFPs had their last IHR training.
- Some decentralization is needed for the implementation of IHR activities at the subnational level in countries.
- There is also a lack of formalized structures or national legal documentation for IHR implementation in many countries.
- There is a need to enhance effective communication, cooperation and information exchange between the countries of the Region as part of the responsibilities of NFPs in responding to public health events.
- Sustained political commitment and lessons learned from past outbreaks are vital for ensuring preparedness for future health crises.
- There is an opportunity to start building the capacity of subnational health authorities to ensure their proper understanding and implementation of IHR regulations.
- It is critical to promote timely dissemination of information to health authorities and policy-makers through the Event Information Site (EIS) platform.

4. Recommendations


To Member States

1. Work with WHO country offices to support the adoption of IHR notification and verification processes.
2. Empower national and subnational IHR focal points to effectively manage and report health events through granting them more authority.
3. Strengthen legislation to better support and enforce the IHR.
4. Allow IHR department officials to access and update information directly on the EIS platform to improve direct communication, reporting and feedback.

5. Conduct IHR basic training for ministry of health departments and all other relevant stakeholders, such as in the animal health sector and chemical and nuclear hazard focal points.

To WHO

6. Keep WHO country offices involved in all communication with IHR NFPs to facilitate discussion and coordination.
7. Improve coordination and cooperation with NFPs through the continuation of both formal and informal meetings.
8. Ensure that newly assigned NFPs are fully informed of the processes for IHR notification and information-sharing through training, meetings, emails and so on.
9. Create easily accessible (ready to use) training modules on the basics of IHR that can be readily deployed.
10. Develop clear standard operating procedures for NFPs and create a simplified workflow.
11. Establish a regional online library (on SharePoint) containing resources and documents related to the IHR.
12. Highlight success stories from countries in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.



World Health Organization
Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean
Monazamet El Seha El Alamia Street,
Extension of Abdel Razak El Sanhoury Street
P.O. Box 7608, Nasr City
Cairo 11371, Egypt
www.emro.who.int