EWARN systems in EMR responding to COVID-19 Pandemic

Countries in EMR implementing an Early Warning, Alert and Response Network (EWARN) are demonstrating flexibility of their surveillance systems by adapting to changing information needs or surveillance operating conditions such as the incorporation of new diseases, in response to the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Editorial note

EWARN is a simplified disease surveillance and response system which focus on early detection of and rapid response to outbreaks or unusual health events. EWARN is implemented by Ministry of Health for countries with complex emergencies with support from WHO and partners, and this system is implemented as an adjunct to the routine national surveillance system which supports existing communicable disease surveillance systems which may be underperforming or disrupted as a result of emergencies (See table).

As of the prevailing COVID-19 situation in EMR countries, EWARN is playing a crucial role in supporting the Ministries of Health in conducting efficient surveillance and response activities.

Afghanistan COVID-19 surveillance

Screening at the PoE is being conducted to enhance the surveillance system for early detection of COVID-19. Active surveillance with investigations and follow-up of suspect cases is ongoing. RRTs are active and technical guidance has been provided at all levels for case finding, investigation, and contact tracing.

Iraq COVID-19 surveillance

EWARN surveillance system is functional only in the IDP and resettlement locations. Initially EWARN was covering COVID-19 through ‘usual’ events, but COVID-19 has now been added to immediately reportable communicable diseases. 3 suspected COVID-19 cases have been reported via EWARN and reported to the national surveillance system and all became negative on testing. Initiatives are in place to enhance EWARN and a national COVID-19 dashboard has been created.

Libya COVID-19 Surveillance

National Guideline For COVID-19 has been developed which states that any suspected or confirmed case should be notified immediately within 24 hours of classification through the IHR focal point.

Somalia COVID-19 surveillance

Somalia has been working to expand the geographic coverage of EWARN to cover more sites and health centers. COVID-19 surveillance has been enhanced through screening for returnee travelers at point of entry, active case findings, contact tracing and event-based surveillance system in all surveillance sites of EWARN to detect any “potential” suspected cases presenting with pneumonia.

Syria COVID-19 surveillance

Currently the EWARN is the only timely surveillance system in the country. Work is ongoing to enhance the link between EWARN system and expanded COVID-19 surveillance. Severe acute respiratory infection (SARI) and unusual events are reported through EWARN, and MoH has modified the case definition to include all SARI cases admitted to ICUs. Enhanced COVID-19 surveillance includes routine surveillance of SARI cases, active search for COVID-19 suspected cases at the hospitals in all governorates, and surveillance at points of entry. Event-based surveillance has been instituted through collecting daily information relevant to COVID-19, as well as rumors among the communities.

Sudan COVID-19 surveillance

EWARN system in Sudan is applied only in the Darfur states, and so far, no suspected cases have been reported by the system. Although the Sudan national action plan for COVID-19 does not specifically mention EWARN, case investigation, active surveillance of COVID-19 and contact tracing is ongoing, including the training of PoE staff on surveillance and case definition. Timely notification of confirmed and probable cases through the IHR system has taken place.

Yemen COVID-19 surveillance

Yemen is conducting screening at the PoE and has enhanced mechanisms for contact tracing. Training for RRTs have also been conducted to scale up their capacity to conduct Contact Tracing, and the deployment of different levels of RRTs within 24 hours for investigation of suspected cases.