

Introduction

Learning from the past

The Western Pacific Region continues to face health security threats caused by emerging infectious diseases, natural hazards and unsafe food. Health emergencies are inevitable, as evidenced by recent outbreaks of avian influenza A(H7N9), Ebola virus disease, Middle East respiratory syndrome (MERS), dengue, Zika virus disease and yellow fever.

We have also seen disasters caused by natural hazards, including Cyclone Winston in Fiji, typhoons in the Philippines, and droughts in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific. Managing these outbreaks and emergencies provided tremendous opportunities for continuous learning and improvement as we respond to emergencies.

Our experience has taught us that health security threats will continue, and they will occur in very unpredictable ways that could challenge even the most advanced health system. As a hotspot for emerging diseases and health emergencies, the Western Pacific is even more vulnerable. As the world becomes more interconnected, diseases can spread more easily and vulnerability has become more universal.

Putting in place a generic and flexible system to manage all hazards has been a worthwhile investment for health emergency preparedness. Recent events have reconfirmed the importance of strengthening the core capacities for health security as mandated under the International Health Regulations, or IHR (2005).



Emerging infectious diseases do not respect borders, and vulnerability to these diseases is universal in an interconnected world.

Strengthening health security on multiple fronts

The *Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases* (APSED) has been the common framework for action used by Member States for IHR implementation over the past decade, resulting in significant achievements. Nineteen out of 27 States Parties have reported attainment of the core capacities mandated under IHR (2005). Event-based surveillance (EBS) has been established in 85% of Member

States. The public health laboratory system has capacities for rapid, safe and accurate diagnosis through improved proficiency in external quality assessments for chikungunya, dengue and influenza. Many Member States have established field epidemiology training programmes tailored to their country context, which means they can train field epidemiologists locally, rather than send them abroad. Several emergency operations centres within ministries of health have been established for preparedness planning

and operational response to public health events and emergencies. At the regional level, the surveillance and risk assessment system has been assessing more than 200 reports per year.

Food safety risks have grown more complex. Globalization of the food chain, climate change, innovations in food technology, urbanization and antimicrobial resistance are issues for consideration in managing food safety risks. Progress was made in implementing the *Western Pacific Regional Food Safety Strategy 2011–2015*. Several countries enhanced the use of risk-based approaches to strengthening national food safety systems. In the Pacific, the *Operational guide for the recall of imported food* was launched to guide the development of food recall systems and the use of the International Food Safety Authorities Network (INFOSAN) as a mechanism for rapid exchange of information among countries.

The Western Pacific Region remains highly susceptible to disasters. Countries were supported in adapting to the effects of climate change and in strengthening disaster risk management capacity. Vanuatu updated its *National Health Plan for Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Management (2016–2020)*, and Solomon Islands conducted a hazards assessment of its National Referral Hospital. Health service delivery assessments were conducted using the Health Resources Availability Mapping System (HeRAMS) in Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. Hospital Safety Index assessments were conducted in Cambodia, the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and Palau.

Looking towards the future and adapting to a new context

The Western Pacific Region now faces a new context. Overall, our Member States have gained better socioeconomic status and improved capacity in managing health security threats as compared to a decade ago. Meanwhile, our Region is confronting more complex health threats caused by various factors such as urbanization, migration, new technologies and climate change. Diseases that used to be obscure are re-emerging, natural disasters are more unpredictable and new threats are more challenging.

There are also new global and regional initiatives that provide both opportunity and challenges to advance health security. These initiatives include the Sustainable Development Goals, universal health coverage, the *Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030*, the *Global Health Security Agenda*, IHR Review Committee recommendations and the post-2016 IHR monitoring and evaluation framework,

including the Joint External Evaluation Tool. Based on the lessons from Ebola, reform of WHO's work in health emergency management and the establishment of a new Health Emergencies Programme will enable WHO to expand beyond its technical and normative roles to become an operational agency.

The changing regional landscape and the new global initiatives necessitate an updated common framework for action that is relevant, flexible and based on the evolving needs of the Member States. Based on the bottom-up consultations, the draft *Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies (APSED III)* has been developed to further strengthen the core systems for emergency preparedness and response and increase regional connectivity. Recognizing the different levels of preparedness of Member States and the changing global context, APSED III provides a flexible platform to implement strategic actions for health security and to connect with other initiatives in the new context. ■



Increased travel and trade expose the Region to health security threats that may originate in other parts of the world.