

3. Emergency Operations Centre: central hub for preparedness and response



The Emergency Operations Centre at the Regional Office enhances intelligence and risk assessments that underpin decision-making, preparedness and coordinated responses among countries and areas.

The Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) at the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific is the mechanism that links all levels of WHO and stakeholders for preparedness planning and operational response to outbreaks and emergencies.

The EOC has served as the centre of surveillance, preparedness and coordination for emergency response. The EOC has become the centre for managing many public health events, including avian influenza A(H7N9) in China, dengue in the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, MERS in the Republic of Korea and Ebola virus disease.

More recently, the EOC has been in full operation for responses to the Zika virus and the observed increases in neurological disorders and neonatal malformations, as well as the aftermath of Cyclone Winston in Fiji.

The regional event-based surveillance system screens 50–200 reports every day. The system has been crucial in detecting public health events at the regional level to inform risk assessments and enable rapid response efforts. Strengthening this system and promoting the use of multiple sources of information are important to enhance understanding of local contexts and capacities to assess and respond to events.

The EOC is the centre of intelligence and risk assessment for decision-making. The Division of Health Security and Emergencies team operates from the EOC on a daily basis, collecting, prioritizing, monitoring and analysing multiple sources of information to conduct risk assessments that inform timely decision-making and response. By using multiple sources of information, the confidence and robustness of risk assessments in public health emergencies have been improved.

The EOC is an essential component of effective event management that through the application of incident-management system (IMS) principles minimizes health, social, economic and environmental impacts.

The EOC serves as the centre to connect people. For the Zika response, the EOC facilitated bringing together different experts to deal with Zika virus disease and the observed increases in neurological disorders and neonatal malformations.

The establishment of EOCs within the ministries of health of Member States continues to be a priority under the updated version of APSED and in the context of the new WHO Health Emergencies Programme. The centres fulfil an important function by enhancing the Region's capacity for collaboration and coordination among countries. ■