



NEXTWORK

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The role and contribution of  
the integrated surveillance and immunization network  
to the COVID-19 response in the WHO South-East Asia Region  
(Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal)

**NeXtwork – The role and contribution of the integrated surveillance and immunization network to the COVID-19 response in the WHO South-East Asia Region (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal)**

ISBN 978-92-9022-889-9

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**Suggested citation.** NeXtwork – The role and contribution of the integrated surveillance and immunization network to the COVID-19 response in the WHO South-East Asia Region (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal). New Delhi: World Health Organization, Regional Office for South-East Asia; 2021. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

**Cataloguing-in-Publication (CIP) data.** CIP data are available at <http://apps.who.int/iris>.

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Printed in India

## Acknowledgements

Under the overall guidance of Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, WHO Regional Director for the South-East Asia Region, and the strategic guidance of Dr Suman Rijal, Director for Communicable Diseases at the Regional Office, and Dr Sunil Bahl, Coordinator, Immunization and Vaccine Development, this document was conceived and developed by Ms Uttara Aggarwal, Technical Officer (Immunization), with constructive support from Dr Sudhir Joshi, Medical Officer (Polio Endgame).

The Regional Office would like to acknowledge the contributions from the ministries of health of Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal, the WHO Representatives to these five countries, current and former WHO staff at all levels of the Organization, as well as implementing partners, representatives of donor agencies and other key stakeholders towards this publication.

*This publication is dedicated to all those who have been directly or indirectly associated with the WHO-managed surveillance and immunization infrastructure, which commenced its journey in the 1990s, to achieve the goal of a polio-free South-East Asia Region.*

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## Foreword



In 2014 the WHO South-East Asia Region achieved the remarkable feat of being certified polio-free. Central to this achievement, which many thought impossible, was the establishment of a laboratory-supported surveillance and immunization infrastructure by the polio endemic countries in the mid-to-late 1990s. India took the lead in the Region and globally in creating such an infrastructure. Four countries of the Region – namely, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Myanmar and Nepal – soon followed, setting up similar infrastructures, hereafter referred to as the Network.

This is the first in-depth account of the Network’s contributions to public health programmes in the Region, including those for other vaccine-preventable diseases, and in response to public health emergencies and disasters. The Network has made critical contributions to the COVID-19 response with the help of its human, logistics and laboratory resources, which must continue to be leveraged.

The introductory chapter of this book offers a glimpse of the Network’s activities from the late 1990s to the present, to facilitate an understanding of the Network’s evolution, its core strengths and contributions. The second chapter highlights the Network’s role in the early phases of the COVID-19 response in the five countries in which it has a presence, and familiarizes the reader with the diverse technical and logistical assistance it has provided.

Since one of the goals of the Network is to be prepared – if and when the need arises – to take on additional immunization and surveillance activities, the concluding chapter offers viewpoints on the direction that the Network may take to meet future health challenges, or the ‘NeXtwork’. The quotes provided throughout the book have been drawn from extensive interviews with current and former WHO staff at all levels of the Organization, as well as implementing partners, representatives of donor agencies, and other key stakeholders.

While detailing the tremendous contributions made by the Network, this book invites readers not only to celebrate, but to reflect on the future of the Network and its value as a public health good, especially amid the COVID-19 response and recovery, and in recognition of the need to enhance preparedness for future health emergencies. I encourage all readers to consider the value of protecting past investments for future gains, for a fairer, healthier and more sustainable South-East Asia Region for all.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "P. Khetrpal".

**Dr Poonam Khetrpal Singh, Regional Director,  
WHO South-East Asia Region**

## Abbreviations and Acronyms

AES	acute encephalitis syndrome	ICMR	Indian Council of Medical Research	MR	measles and rubella	RI	routine immunization
AFP	acute flaccid paralysis	IDSP	Integrated Diseases Surveillance Programme	NCDC	National Centre for Disease Control	RSO	regional surveillance officer
ASHA	accredited social health activists	IEC	information, education and communication	NGOs	nongovernmental organizations	RVV	rotavirus vaccine
CEPI	Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations	IEDCR	Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research	NHL	National Health Laboratory	SARI	severe acute respiratory infection
CEU	central epidemiology unit	ILI	influenza-like illness	NITAG	National Immunization Technical Advisory Group	SEA	South-East Asia
CSOs	civil society organizations	IMS	incident management system	NIV	National Institute of Virology	SEAR TCG	South-East Asia Regional Technical Consultative Group
DSOs	divisional surveillance officers	IMT	incident management team	NPHL	National Public Health Laboratory	SIA	supplementary immunization activity
EPI	Expanded Programme on Immunization	IPC	infection prevention and control	NPSP	National Polio Surveillance Project, since renamed as National Public-health Support Programme	SIMO	surveillance and immunization medical officer
EQA	external quality assurance	IPD	immunization preventable diseases	OPV	oral polio vaccine	SMO	surveillance medical officer
EWARS	Early Warning Alert and Response System	IPV	inactivated polio vaccine	PCR	polymerase chain reaction	SOPs	standard operating procedures
FLWs	frontline workers	IVD	immunization and vaccine development	PEN	Polio Eradication Nepal	TIMB	Transition Independent Monitoring Board
Gavi	Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance	JE	Japanese encephalitis	PHOs	provincial health officers	TWG	Technical Working Group
GPEI	Global Polio Eradication Initiative	MoH	Ministry of Health	PLN	Polio Laboratory Network	US CDC	United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
GPLN	Global Polio Laboratory Network	MoHFW	Ministry of Health and Family Welfare	PPE	personal protective equipment	VPD	vaccine-preventable disease
HMIS	health management information system	MoHP	Ministry of Health and Population	RCCE	risk communication and community engagement	WHE	WHO Health Emergencies Programme
HPV	human papillomavirus	MoHS	Ministry of Health and Sports			WHO	World Health Organization
IBD	invasive bacterial disease						





▲ REUTERS /Jorge Silva



## The inside story

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