

A Guide to Establishing Event-based Surveillance



World Health
Organization

Western Pacific Region

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Purpose of the guide

In line with the recommendations of the Asia Pacific Technical Advisory Group (TAG) on Emerging Infectious Diseases and in response to requests from Member States, the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office has developed the following guide for the design of event-based surveillance systems.

What is Event-based Surveillance?

Event-based surveillance is the organized and rapid capture of information about events that are a potential risk to public health.¹ This information can be rumours and other ad-hoc reports transmitted through formal channels (i.e. established routine reporting systems) and informal channels (i.e. media, health workers and nongovernmental organizations reports), including:

- **Events related to the occurrence of disease in humans**, such as clustered cases of a disease or syndromes, unusual disease patterns or unexpected deaths as recognized by health workers and other key informants in the country; and
- **Events related to potential exposure for humans**, such as events related to diseases and deaths in animals, contaminated food products or water, and environmental hazards including chemical and radio-nuclear events.

Information received through event-based surveillance should be rapidly assessed for the risk the event poses to public health and responded to appropriately.

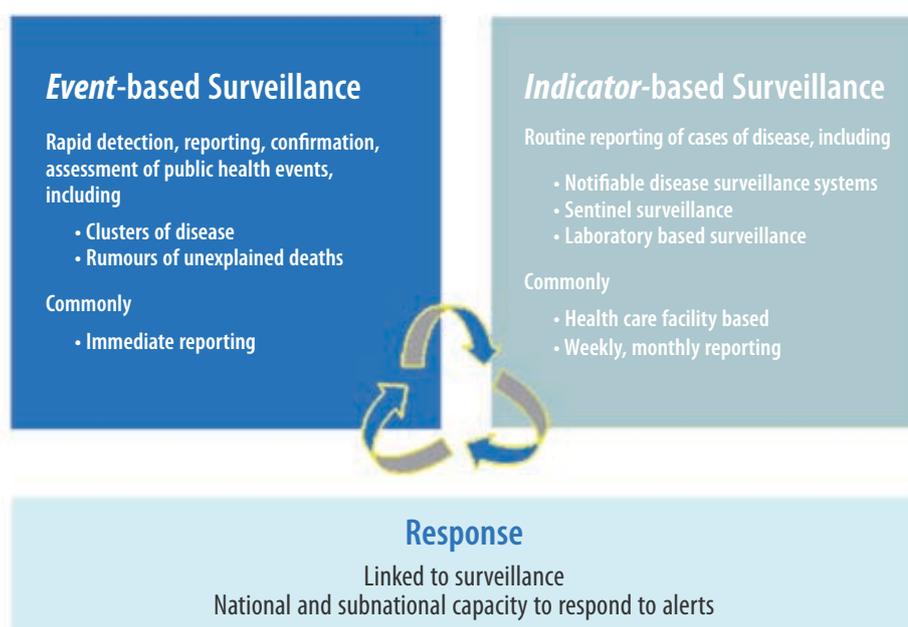
Unlike classic surveillance, event-based surveillance is not based on the routine collection of data and automated thresholds for action but rather on unstructured descriptions and reports.

¹ The definition of event-based surveillance has been adapted from the unpublished WHO EWARN guideline.

Rationale for Event-based Surveillance

Event-based surveillance complements indicator-based surveillance. Both systems should be seen as essential components of a single national surveillance system (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Surveillance and response system



When it comes to the timely detection of outbreaks and important public health events, indicator-based surveillance systems often fail. Furthermore, the systems are not suited to the detection of rare but high impact outbreaks (SARS, Avian, Dengue, Swine, Asian Influenza), an emerging and

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