

PROTECTING HEALTH THROUGH GLOBAL EPIDEMIC CONTROL

Developing laboratory partnerships to detect infections and prevent epidemics



**World Health
Organization**

Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response

**WHO Lyon Office for National Epidemic
Preparedness and Response**

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Executive summary

The world is changing. New microbes have appeared and old diseases have re-emerged. Coupled with increases in global traffic and trade, public health risks frequently traverse national boundaries. Effective national surveillance systems are essential to prevent international spread of epidemic diseases. Within these systems, public health laboratories play a critical role. Sadly, these structures and the staff who work in them have long been considered in many countries to be unimportant and consequently are poorly resourced.

Partnerships are now widely considered to be crucial to the efforts to improve health conditions in developing countries. Bringing together different organizations from different sectors has been shown to be an effective means of leveraging more resources and expertise to tackle public health problems.

As part of its contribution towards WHO's work on global health security, the Integrated Capacity Development Programme for Laboratory Specialists, managed by the WHO Lyon Office for National Epidemic Preparedness and Response assists countries to improve the knowledge and skills of laboratory staff and to provide resources to enable the detection of, and response to, epidemics which threaten public health.

The proposed project, based on partnership, is designed to complement and extend the Integrated Capacity Development Programme for Laboratory Specialists and promote the improvement of public health laboratory capacity in developing countries in a sustainable manner.

The project is based on twinning public health laboratories in developing countries with specialized public health or research institutions (usually but not only) in developed countries to undertake specific collaborative projects. A partnership network of laboratories engaged in such twinning projects will permit the participants to exchange information, share experiences, avoid gaps and duplications, highlight successes and best practices, and coordinate shared activities.

Supporting twinning projects can lead to sustainable improvement in public health laboratory capacities and have a positive impact on public health systems.

The challenge

The growing threat of epidemics

Epidemics and newly-emerging infections are threatening the health of people globally and impacting on travel and trade in our increasingly interconnected world. Many epidemic threats, such as cholera, meningitis, yellow fever and dengue, recurrently challenge health systems in countries with very limited resources. Others, such as influenza and severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), have demonstrated their potential to create new pandemics.

Natural disasters may result in epidemics in affected populations and the risk of accidental or intentional release of biological agents is an additional threat to global health security. Epidemics, recurrent or unanticipated, add to the heavy burden borne by health services struggling to cope with the major diseases of poverty such as AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, and the growing impact of non-communicable diseases.

Limited capacity for response

For more than 50 years, scientific and technological advances have created tremendous opportunities for progress in combating infectious diseases, but developing countries cannot find solutions to their public health problems merely by acquiring equipment and medicines. Today, the need for skills and aptitude to apply new knowledge and devise solutions to local problems is paramount. The latest technological advances are not required in every centre, but every country needs the capacity to identify and respond rapidly to epidemic threats.

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