



Concept Note:
Southeast Asia Red Cross/Red Crescent
Pandemic and Public Health Emergency Preparedness Workshop
17 – 20 November 2014 | Singapore

Introduction

National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in Southeast Asia had been in the forefront of assisting authorities in preparing for and responding to public health emergencies in their countries, as well as in cooperating with regional National Societies to maximise preparedness and response efforts. These have been illustrated in recent high-profile and high-impact public health emergencies, such as the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), highly-pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) H5N1 and influenza pandemic H1N1, where National Societies in the region actively supported community-based preparedness and response planning focusing on non-pharmaceutical interventions, risk communications and inter-agency coordination. They also developed contingency and business continuity plans to ensure that they can continue to deliver their humanitarian mandates in the midst of these emergencies.

Despite achievements in securing public health, the world is still vulnerable to infectious diseases which can easily spread to different regions and countries, unnecessarily kill people, overwhelm health systems and disrupt societal functioning; these have severe impact on poor communities and individuals who usually bear the brunt of these catastrophic events. After the influenza pandemic H1N1 in 2009, the international community's attention had been averting another global public health emergency triggered by influenza H7N9, Middle East Respiratory syndrome (MERS) coronavirus, and just in 2014 the ebola virus disease (EVD).

Leaders of National Societies in Southeast Asia, during its annual meeting in March 2014 in Singapore, acknowledged that these threats are real and resolved that each National Society – based on their mandates – maintains capacity to help prevent and mitigate their impacts to vulnerable communities, as well as respond to resulting humanitarian needs. In addition, mechanisms for regional cooperation and resource sharing are to be in place to maximise impact of individual efforts.

For the above reasons, the Regional Community Safety and Resilience Forum (RCSRf) consisting of heads of health and disaster management departments of National Societies in the region – supported by the IFRC Southeast Asia regional office – is organising a Southeast Asia Pandemic and Public Health Emergencies Workshop from 17-20 November 2014 in Singapore to identify and agree on priority actions at national and regional levels to materialise the vision of National Society leaders in the region. It will also take stock on the status of National Society readiness to pandemics and public health emergencies, as well as explore how on-going efforts in community resilience strengthening can be capitalised to address these public health threats.



Rationale

Threats of pandemics due to respiratory viruses exist. The world has just witnessed influenza pandemic H1N1 in 2009, while it was considered mild due to lower infection rates and fewer deaths, it caused much disruption in international travel and. While WHO declared the end of the influenza pandemic H1N1 in August 2010, cases of HPAI H5N1 continue to be recorded in a number of countries in Southeast Asia, and novel respiratory viruses emerged very recently – influenza H7N9 in China in 2012 and MERS coronavirus in Egypt in 2013 – and were feared to trigger another global public health concern. In early 2014, the world experienced an unprecedented outbreak of the lethal ECV in West Africa and which require a global coordinated effort in order to contain and control it.

Southeast Asia is also considered as one of the hotspots where new infectious diseases emerge. In addition, a number of countries continue to experience outbreaks of infectious diseases – such as acute diarrhoea, dengue or leptospirosis - as well as public health events compounding from natural disasters.

Governments and health authorities of countries in Asia Pacific have exerted substantial efforts to protect and prepare countries and communities from these threats. Guided by the Asia Pacific strategy for emerging diseases, among others, countries have strengthened health systems capacity at various levels as well as disaster/emergency management mechanisms via a multi-hazard, all-of-society approach. Health system efforts to address public health emergencies were also made to fulfil national obligations to the International Health Regulations (IHR).

In Southeast Asia, national pandemic preparedness and response capacity strengthening was also reinforced through regional cooperation coordinated by the ASEAN secretariat. Countries also established the ASEAN Technical Working Group for Pandemic Preparedness and Response (ATWGPPR) to provide a platform for cooperation among countries, as well as partners from the humanitarian, military, civil society and private sector, to name a few. SEA countries have also put priority in developing capacities in responding to emerging infections and have carried out initiatives to strengthen surveillance, early warning and early response among others.

National Societies in Southeast Asia have a long history of assisting national authorities and communities in preparing for and responding to outbreaks, epidemics and public health threats in their countries. Recently, these include high-impact public health threats, such as SARS, HPAI H5N1, influenza pandemic H1N1, among others. When the international community was preparing for an influenza pandemic supposedly triggered by HPAI H5N1, many SEA National Societies have been actively engaged in strengthening community preparedness focussing on non-pharmaceutical interventions and risk communications, expanding coordination and engagement of partners at national and community, as well as enhancing community preparedness including business continuity planning. The capacity of National Societies to quickly roll out preventive public health messages to communities at national scale was proven with influenza pandemic H1N1, one of the critical capacities in outbreak and pandemic response.

The efforts of National Societies to be prepared for future pandemics and other public health emergencies, as well as to support communities develop preparedness and response capacities for the same, are to be periodically revisited and tested. The pandemic preparedness efforts of



National Societies in 2007-2009 were considered ‘unfinished business’ as these were interrupted by the evolution of influenza pandemic H1N1. There is now an opportunity to complete the preparedness process as part of the overall emergency health (which encompasses public health emergencies and health aspects of disasters); the latter being part of the multi-hazard, one system approach to disaster management.

Objectives

The Workshop will bring together health, disaster management and relevant senior managers of Southeast Asia National Societies and relevant stakeholders in Southeast Asia to:

- Enhanced knowledge of the participants on latest development on pandemic preparedness and emergency health within RCRC movement and strategy of relevant stakeholders.
- Review the current status of global and regional preparedness, as well as that of National Societies, related to influenza pandemics and public health emergencies.
- Agree on a framework and outline for a contingency plan and standard operating procedures (SOP) that guide National Societies in Southeast Asia in responding to influenza pandemics and public health emergencies, individually as a national organisation auxiliary to authorities and collectively as a humanitarian network in Southeast Asia
- Agree on a plan of action for influenza pandemic and public health emergencies capacity strengthening at National Society and regional levels, which are in line with plans and priorities of national authorities and regional bodies.

Workshop content/agenda

In order to achieve objectives, the four-day workshop will cover the following topics/agenda points:

- Review of the global state of readiness to influenza pandemics
- Review on the essential aspects in preparing for influenza pandemics and public health emergencies
- Updates on regional efforts to protect the society from pandemic and public health emergency threats – such as the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases (APSED) and ASEAN Technical Working Group on Pandemic Preparedness and Response (ATWGPPR) among others
- Review of lessons on pandemic preparedness, such as on inter-agency partnerships, organisational preparedness and business continuity planning, and community preparedness
- Review of lessons on outbreak/epidemic preparedness, particularly on community preparedness via training and equipage of responders, and organisational preparedness through contingency planning; discussions on the outcomes/findings and recommendations of the epidemic control for volunteers’ toolkit and training manual review will also be discussed.
- Identification of priority actions in strengthening individual National society preparedness and capacity efforts
- Identification of priority actions in maximising preparedness via regional cooperation mechanisms



Methodology of the workshop

The Workshop is designed using inter-active and participatory approaches that facilitate exchange of knowledge and experience among National Societies and relevant stakeholders. It will be delivered through plenary presentations, panel discussions, small group discussions and presentation of outputs, and a table-top exercise.

The Workshop will be preceded by a mapping of National Society readiness to influenza pandemics which will be used as one of the bases in the development action plans for preparedness.

It will be delivered in English.

Participants

There shall be one or two participants from each National Society coming from the health or/and disaster management departments. National Society representatives may be the head of health or senior office for emergency health; the head of disaster management or senior officer for disaster preparedness. It is desirable that senior staff who have been actively engaged in pandemic preparedness represent National Societies.

The IFRC Southeast Asia Regional Delegation will facilitate necessary funding support for National Societies who are unable to cover travel and accommodation costs for their participants.

Resource persons from the secretariat of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the WHO Western Pacific regional office, the Asian Development Bank will support the Workshop through plenary presentations and technical inputs in group discussions.