

SEVERE ACUTE RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS)
AND OTHER OUTBREAK-PRONE DISEASES

The Regional Committee,

Recalling resolution WHA56.29 on severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and WHA56.28 on the revision of the International Health Regulations;

Recognizing the dedication and courage of the health workers of the Western Pacific Region in responding to SARS outbreaks;

Further recognizing the health workers who lost their lives combating the disease and WHO staff member Dr Carlo Urbani, who in late February 2003 first brought SARS to the attention of the international community and died of SARS on 29 March 2003;

Acknowledging that strong government commitment, excellent collaboration between Member States and the international community, and rapid mobilization of human and financial resources in affected countries enabled effective measures to contain the spread of SARS to be implemented;

Concerned that outbreak-prone diseases such as SARS pose serious threats to public health, health care systems and economic stability in the Western Pacific Region;

Recognizing the need to have access to information from all sources, including informal sources, and to exchange information about disease outbreaks in a timely and transparent manner in order to prevent the international spread of diseases;

Noting that many Member States in the Region still do not have adequate capacity to detect and respond to outbreak-prone diseases such as SARS;

Noting further that the outbreaks exposed serious weaknesses in public health systems at all levels as well as in infection control practices;

Recognizing the importance of laboratory safety to prevent laboratory-acquired SARS infections;

Further recognizing that suspected SARS cases can cause disruption in health services and that cases of pneumonia related to influenza may be classified as suspected SARS cases;

1. URGES Member States:

(1) to strengthen, where appropriate, epidemiological and laboratory capacity for surveillance of and response to outbreak-prone diseases, including emerging diseases;

(2) to establish a system capable of verifying all information on public health events of potential international concern and of responding to requests from WHO;

(3) to participate actively in regional surveillance, including collaboration between laboratories, and sharing of biological samples, so that timely and accurate information can be shared with other Member States;

(4) to take all measures to ensure the laboratory containment of SARS coronavirus when handling potentially infectious materials and to conduct research involving the SARS coronavirus only in qualified laboratories approved by the appropriate body and with an appropriate level of biosafety;

(5) to report all public health events of international concern promptly to WHO, and to provide other relevant information requested by WHO;

(6) to collaborate promptly and fully with WHO in the investigation and implementation of control measures, including border control measures, for disease outbreaks of international concern;

(7) to provide influenza vaccine, where feasible, to high-risk groups, in particular older persons, people with chronic diseases and health workers, in order to reduce the number of pneumonia cases caused by influenza that may be classified as suspected SARS cases;

(8) to establish or strengthen national programmes for infection control in health care settings, including the implementation of appropriate national training programmes;

2. REQUESTS the Regional Director:

(1) to support Member States to strengthen capacity for communicable disease surveillance and response;

(2) to further strengthen regional surveillance, taking into account reports from sources other than official notifications, so that information on communicable diseases can be shared among Member States;

(3) to collaborate with Member States to ensure that all public health events of international concern are investigated promptly and comprehensively and to send WHO missions to investigate such events whenever necessary;

- (4) to coordinate and stimulate research into important public health areas related to SARS, including the possible role of a natural reservoir of SARS in the environment;
- (5) to ensure that the major events and lessons learned from SARS outbreaks are properly recorded and shared among Member States;
- (6) to incorporate lessons learned when working with the Director-General on future travel advisories and with the Member States on border control measures.

Ninth meeting, 12 September 2003
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