

Key facts

The Western Pacific Region is a **hotspot for emerging infectious diseases** and health emergencies.

The Region witnessed the emergence of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) – the first major emerging **infectious disease of the 21st century**.

Outbreaks of mosquito-borne diseases, foodborne diseases and other illnesses have challenged the Western Pacific Region.

Eight of the top 15 countries most exposed to natural disasters globally are in the Western Pacific Region.

A one-dollar investment in emergency preparedness can return almost eight times that amount in economic gains.

Pandemics can claim millions of lives and devastate economies. In 1918, an influenza pandemic **killed an estimated 20-50 million people**. Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) led to **US\$ 40 billion in economic losses** in 2003. The 2009 influenza A(H1N1) pandemic **spread to more than 210 countries and areas in just one year**.

Over the past decade, **considerable investments** have been made in outbreak and emergency preparedness. Member States have advanced implementation of the International Health Regulations, or IHR (2005), and helped make the Western Pacific Region **safer for its nearly 1.9 billion people**.

Much has changed, **but the threat remains**. A lot of work still needs to be done to prepare for outbreaks and pandemics.

At the same time, countries face other challenges, such as **natural disasters**, instability and turmoil. The United Nations Secretary-General recently issued a worldwide “red alert”, citing human rights violations, climate change, risk of nuclear war, rising nationalism and xenophobia. **Ensuring the safety of our food has also become more complex** in today’s increasingly interconnected world.

WHO response

WHO is committed to **saving lives and protecting health** in times of crisis – whether caused by outbreaks, conflicts or natural disasters. The Organization’s 13th General Programme of Work lays out an ambitious goal to ensure that 1 billion more people are better protected from health emergencies.

The **WHO Health Emergencies Programme** was established in 2016 to facilitate a faster, more predictable and effective response to outbreaks and emergencies. In the Western Pacific Region, the Programme is now embedded in the Division of Health Security and Emergencies, alongside the Organization’s work on **food safety**, which includes support for Member States to manage food safety risks and respond to food safety incidents and emergencies.

Through the *Asia-Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies (APSED III)* we are working with countries and partners to advance the capacities required to rapidly detect, respond to and recover from any emergency health threat. Through the *Western Pacific Regional Framework for Action for Disaster Risk Management for Health*, we are working to minimize the health consequences of disasters. Together, we strive for **IMPACT**:

- **Improve** country preparedness
- **Monitor** signs of outbreaks and emergencies and assess risks
- **Prevent** and control the spread of priority infectious diseases
- **Advance** WHO readiness
- **Coordinate** and support emergency response
- **Team up** with partners

