

WPR/RC55.R5

OUTBREAK RESPONSE, INCLUDING SEVERE ACUTE  
RESPIRATORY SYNDROME (SARS), INFLUENZA AND THE  
REVISION OF THE INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS

The Regional Committee,

Recalling resolutions WHA56.19 on prevention and control of influenza pandemics and annual epidemics, WHA56.28 on the revision of the International Health Regulations (IHR), WHA56.29 on severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and WPR/RC54.R7 also on SARS;

Recognizing the need to strengthen the capacity of each country to detect, verify report and respond to significant public health emergencies;

Recognizing further that emerging diseases such as SARS and avian influenza pose serious threats to public health and economic and social stability in the South-East Asia and Western Pacific Regions of WHO and that both SARS and avian influenza were transmitted across the borders between the two regions;

Recognizing further that most emerging communicable diseases are zoonotic in origin;

Concerned that lack of knowledge makes it difficult to assess accurately the risks that SARS and influenza A (H5N1) pose to human health;

Aware that laboratories can be a source of outbreaks of SARS and other serious communicable diseases;

Recognizing also that new subtypes of influenza, including influenza A (H5N1), have the potential to cause a pandemic, with a huge impact on human health and great social disruption;

Acknowledging the importance of further testing of specimens for causative agents of emerging diseases in WHO reference laboratories;

Appreciating WHO's support for pandemic preparedness, including vaccine development for influenza A (H5N1) and national pandemic preparedness plans;

Appreciating also the recommendations of the regional consultation on the revision of the International Health Regulations, in particular its support for the use of the Decision Instrument, supplemented by a disease list;

Acknowledging the consultation's recommendation that account needs to be taken of both national sovereignty and global health security issues;

Recognizing the importance of providing transparent, timely and appropriate information on disease outbreaks to the public;

1. URGES Member States:

- (1) to strengthen their capacity for surveillance and response so that each country can detect, verify, report and respond to public health emergencies;
- (2) to further strengthen collaboration and coordination between health and agricultural sectors, including surveillance systems to enhance early detection of zoonotic diseases such as avian influenza and SARS;
- (3) to coordinate the involvement of all concerned sectors in the response to disease outbreaks;
- (4) to share specimens from suspected or confirmed cases of emerging diseases with WHO reference laboratories;
- (5) to encourage the coordination of research on SARS, avian influenza and other emerging diseases and to share information with WHO;
- (6) to establish or strengthen national biosafety programmes to prevent laboratory-acquired cases of SARS and other communicable diseases;
- (7) to establish or strengthen national influenza programmes, covering surveillance, disease burden assessment, control strategies and pandemic preparedness;
- (8) to develop and share national pandemic preparedness plans as soon as possible, if they have not already done so;

- (9) to participate actively in the intergovernmental working group on the revision of the International Health Regulations;
- (10) to provide transparent, timely and appropriate information on disease outbreaks to the public;

2. REQUESTS the Regional Director:

- (1) to continue to support Member States to strengthen their capacity for communicable disease surveillance and response;
- (2) to strengthen regional outbreak alert and response networks;
- (3) to facilitate the sharing of specimens from national laboratories with WHO reference laboratories, while taking into account appropriate protection of the rights of the Member States involved;
- (4) to coordinate further with international partner organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the World Organisation for Animal Health to reduce the risk posed to humans by zoonotic diseases such as avian influenza and SARS;
- (5) to develop, in collaboration with WHO's South-East Asia Regional Office, a biregional strategy for strengthening capacity for communicable disease surveillance and response, which also addresses the need for improvements to food safety aspects of animal husbandry, and to present the strategy to the Regional Committee for its endorsement in 2005;
- (6) to continue to support Member States to improve national biosafety programmes to prevent laboratory-acquired cases of SARS and other communicable diseases;
- (7) to continue to support Member States to develop national pandemic preparedness plans;
- (8) to support capacity building for risk communication in Member States.