

Guidance For Managing Ethical Issues In Infectious Disease Outbreaks



World Health
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Foreword



Infectious disease outbreaks are periods of great uncertainty. Events unfold, resources and capacities that are often limited are stretched yet further, and decisions for a public health response must be made quickly, even though the evidence for decision-making may be scant. In such a situation, public health officials, policy-makers, funders, researchers, field epidemiologists, first responders, national ethics boards, health-care workers, and public health practitioners need a moral compass to guide them in their decision-making. Bioethics puts people at the heart of the problem, emphasizes the principles that should guide health systems, and provides the moral rationale for making choices, particularly in a crisis.

I therefore welcome the development of the *Guidance for managing ethical issues in infectious disease outbreaks*, which will be key to embedding ethics within the integrated global alert and response system for epidemics and other public health emergencies. The publication will also support and strengthen the implementation and uptake of policies and programmes in this context.

Research is an integral part of the public health response – not only to learn about the current epidemic but also to build an evidence base for future epidemics. Research during an epidemic ranges from epidemiological and socio-behavioral to clinical trials and toxicity studies, all of which are crucial. I am pleased

to see that the guidance touches upon this important area with advice, not only on research and emergency use of unproven interventions, but also on rapid data sharing see: http://www.who.int/ihr/procedures/SPG_data_sharing.pdf?ua=1.

The importance given to communication during an infectious disease outbreak can make or break public health efforts, and WHO takes this very seriously. This document outlines the ethical principles that should guide communication planning and implementation at every level from frontline workers to policy-makers.

The guidance represents the work of an international group of stakeholders and experts, including public health practitioners in charge of response management at the local, national and international level; nongovernmental organization representatives; directors of funding agencies; chairs of ethics committees; heads of research laboratories; representatives of national regulatory agencies; patient representatives; and experts in public health ethics, bioethics, human rights, anthropology, and epidemiology. I am grateful for their support and input.

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