

Outbreak surveillance and response in humanitarian emergencies

WHO guidelines for EWARN implementation

Geneva, 2012

DISEASE CONTROL IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES



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The guideline was developed by a core group of experts from the TWG, the Guideline Development Group, and benefitted from the input of experts from WHO and partner organizations involved in EWARN systems in emergencies, including the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Epicentre, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the United Nations Children's Fund, the European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO), the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, International Relief & Development, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Training Programs in Epidemiology and Public Health Interventions Network.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AFP	acute flaccid paralysis
AWD	acute watery diarrhoea
CDC	United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
CFR	case-fatality ratio
CSF	cerebrospinal fluid
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection
EPI	Expanded Programme on Immunization
EWARN	early warning alert and response network
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IHR/PHEIC	International Health Regulations/Public Health Emergencies of International Concern
IPD	in-patient department
MoH	ministry of health
NGO	nongovernmental organization
OCT	outbreak control team
OFDA	Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance
OPD	outpatient department
RDT	rapid diagnostic test
SMS	short message service
TWG	Technical Working Group
WASH	water, sanitation and hygiene
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

Background and objective

Humanitarian emergencies often involve the displacement of large numbers of people. Those affected are frequently settled in temporary locations with high population densities, inadequate food and shelter, unsafe water, poor sanitation and lack of infrastructure. These circumstances can increase the risk of transmission of communicable diseases and other conditions, and can thus lead to increased mortality (death). In particular, diseases that have a tendency to become epidemic (referred to as epidemic-prone diseases) can be a major cause of morbidity (disease) and mortality during emergencies. Rapid detection and prompt response to epidemics among the affected population is a key priority during humanitarian crises.

During humanitarian emergencies, broad public health surveillance systems may be underperforming, disrupted or non-existent; they may quickly become overwhelmed to adequately meet surveillance information needs of a humanitarian emergency, including timeliness and high data quality. An early warning alert and response network (EWARN) is needed and is often set up to fill this gap, particularly in the acute phase of an emergency, while the routine systems recover from the effects of the disaster.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has produced guidance on surveillance and communicable disease control in emergencies; however, practical up-to-date operational guidelines are lacking. The purpose of this document is to provide a standard framework and best current practice for implementation of an EWARN and its operation in the field, following humanitarian emergencies.

EWARN is an adjunct, not a substitute for the national disease surveillance system, and once the acute emergency phase is over, it should be re-integrated into the national surveillance system.

Target audience

These guidelines are intended for all individuals responsible for disease surveillance activities at all levels. These individuals include health facility staff, surveillance officers, epidemiologists, data analysts and statisticians, government health officials, sanitarians, managers of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI), public health officers, laboratory personnel and community health workers.

Structure

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