Activity Report 2006

WHO Office for National Epidemic Preparedness and Response, Lyon, France Department of Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response





World Health Organization

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INTRODUCTION

Public health was very much at the forefront of the news in 2006 with the serious outbreaks of avian influenza among bird populations, the transmission of the virus to humans (with 263 cases reported on 31 December 2006, 158 of which were fatal) and the very real threat of a human influenza pandemic.



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2006 was a year of change for the World Health Organization (WHO). For WHO as a whole there was an unexpected change in leadership following the sad and untimely death of the Director-General Dr Lee Jong-wook on 22 May 2006. For the WHO Lyon Office for National Epidemic Preparedness and Response it was a year that saw the consolidation of the first five years of activities and a challenging reorientation for future work in global health security and the revised International Health Regulations (IHR(2005)).

History of the WHO Lyon Office

The WHO Lyon Office (LYO) was inaugurated on 8 February 2001 with funding for an initial duration of five years. On 13 April 2005 a new Declaration of Partners was signed by the French Ministry of Health and Solidarity, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Rhône-Alpes Region, the Rhône Department, the Grand Lyon, the Institut Pasteur, and WHO, stating the partners' political and financial engagement to support LYO activities for a second five-year period. In addition, a quadripartite agreement between WHO and the three local authorities (the Rhône-Alpes Region, the Rhône Department, and the Grand Lyon), as well as individual agreements between WHO and each of the above partners were finalized and signed in 2006.

In addition to significant contributions from the French Government, invaluable support for LYO activities has also been provided by the Governments of Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and the United States of America, as well as by private foundations and other institutions (a full list is provided in Appendix 3).

LYO, while geographically situated in France, is organizationally an integral part of WHO Headquarters within the Department of Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response (EPR), Communicable Disease cluster. Since November 2006, the WHO Lyon Office is a part of the IHR Coordination Programme. The new responsibilities conferred on LYO in the support to strengthening national public health security are in line with the core areas of WHO's work highlighted by Dr Margaret Chan, the new WHO Director-General in her speech on 9 November 2006.

THE INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS: NEW CHALLENGES FOR THE WHO LYON OFFICE

The International Health Regulations (IHR(2005)), adopted by the World Health Assembly in May 2005, provide an international legal framework for a global response to any public health event of international concern. WHO Member States have committed to develop at national, intermediate and peripheral levels, minimum core capacities for the early detection, investigation and response to events, such as epidemics with high risk of international spread.

IHR(2005) take into account the new international concern for health security as illustrated by SARS or the threat of pandemic influenza. Global health security has become a priority for WHO and its Member States.

Indeed, in the light of the increasing threat of pandemic influenza, the Fifty-ninth World Health Assembly held in May 2006 adopted a resolution calling on Member States to comply immediately on a voluntary basis with IHR(2005) requirements for pandemic influenza preparedness and response. The timely and appropriate national alert and response to public health emergencies require the mobilization of national capacities to:

detect early an unusual disease threat;

 rapidly activate the verification process and technical investigation;

 provide timely information to all those who need to know, particularly for risk assessment; and

set up an appropriate and timely response.

WHO, in collaboration with international partners, provides guidance, sets standards, develops tools and guidelines, and supports individual Member States in the strengthening of national alert and response systems.

LYO has specific expertise and experience in strengthening national capacities, and can considerably contribute to global IHR implementation, in support to WHO regional and national offices. Thus the overarching objective of the Office is to dedicate all its resources to support the implementation of IHR(2005) at country level and play a global technical coordination role.



World Health Assembly, May 2006

PROGRAMMATIC AREAS

With the continued support of the Government of France, the three local authorities and other important donors (see full list in Appendix 3) and technical partners (see full list in Appendix 4), LYO is building on lessons learnt in the first five years of its existence and applying them to IHR(2005) implementation.

The LYO mission is to coordinate and support WHO's efforts in strengthening national surveillance and response systems in order that all countries can detect, assess, notify and respond to events that may constitute a public health emergency of international concern.

In previous years, the activities of LYO have been summarized and presented in four main areas:

- in-country support;
- networks of competence;
- training; and
- global reference tools.

This organizational matrix is maintained in this report, and a section highlighting IHR implementation activities in 2006 has been added.

In recognition of the reinforced orientation towards IHR, and based on experience and lessons learnt in the first five years of the Office, LYO will now focus on strengthening national core capacities through: assisting in the implementation of total quality management in public health laboratories (PHLs), with a focus on external quality assessment, training and laboratory twinning projects;

 developing guidance for the implementation of new requirements related to points of entry (airports, ports and ground crossings); and

• training and education in relation to global health security and IHR(2005); enhancing the competencies of different IHR actors, including members of the National IHR Focal Point institutions, epidemiologists, laboratory specialists and other senior public health professionals, as well as professionals outside the health field e.g. lawyers, policy-makers and industry.

Monitoring and evaluation of overall IHR implementation is also based in Lyon and is central for the annual report preparation on IHR implementation progress to be presented at the World Health Assembly.

Cross-cutting activities, common to, and underpinning, all areas of work in LYO include: communications, media relations and advocacy; and management and administration (see LYO organization chart in Appendix 1).

Review of activities in 2006

IHR(2005) implementation

Much of the experience gained in the first five-year period of LYO will be relevant to assisting countries to meet the new requirements of IHR(2005). Building on this experience, and on the existing active collaborations with the WHO regional offices, LYO coordinated and participated in a number of IHR implementation activities in 2006.



International consultation on IHR(2005), Lyon, May 2006

International consultation

In May 2006, LYO organized an international consultation on strengthening national capacities for epidemic preparedness and response in support to the materials, development of an IHR monitoring and evaluation framework, and the initiation of training of national and international experts to support national assessments of IHR core capacities.

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