European Strategy Meeting for implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005)

Luxembourg

26 -27 February 2013

Scope and purpose

Background

The International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR) came into force in 2007. They are legally binding and require States Parties to have established national core capacities for public health surveillance and response throughout their territory and for designated points of entry by 15 June 2012.

A States Party may report to WHO on the basis of a justified need and an implementation plan and, in so doing, obtain an extension of two years in which to fulfill its obligations for IHR implementation. To date, 21 (38%) States Parties in the European Region have requested an extension until 2014, of whom 13 have developed a specific implementation plan.

Emergency preparedness and maintenance of capacities will be a continuous process. Also after the past milestone of 15 June 2012, implementation of the IHR remains a priority for the European Region. The establishment of core capacities continues to present a challenge in many technical areas, especially in legislation, capacities at points of entry, surveillance and response, laboratory capacity and human resource development. Besides specific capacities, the broad scope of the IHR remains challenging, since they cover all hazards and public health risks of biological, chemical and radionuclear origin. The WHO Regional Office for Europe is therefore continuing to support and assist States Parties to further establish and maintain their capacities for preparedness, surveillance and response in accordance with the IHR.

The above-mentioned meeting will be held back-to-back with the EWRS (Early Warning and Response System) Contact Point Meeting on 25 February 2013 organized by the European Commission (EC). Over the past two years the EWRS meeting organized by the European Commission has provided an excellent opportunity to address issues in relation to implementation of the IHR, as in most Member States the participants are in charge of both EWRS and IHR. This joint effort by EC and WHO/Europe has not only avoided additional travel, it has also made it possible to identify technical and strategic synergies for surveillance of and response to public health threats. The invitation of additional participants from ministries of health to the upcoming WHO/Europe meeting might provide a further opportunity for Member States to coordinate and consolidate their views.

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1 The time frames are slightly different for Liechtenstein and Montenegro which became States Parties after the IHR entered into force.
Objectives

Strengthening national core capacities for surveillance and response to all hazards to national, regional and global health security requires a concerted effort from States Parties, partners and the global public health community. This meeting constitutes an opportunity to discuss the progress made and the process ahead, to share experiences and to address specific gaps and challenges in IHR implementation. In particular, it will provide a platform to map partners and to enhance intercountry and interregional support and exchange of experts.

Specifically, the meeting will:

- provide a platform to develop a common understanding of the IHR and its principles and to ensure coherence in the implementation process in the WHO European Region;
- discuss gaps and strategies with regard to IHR implementation;
- provide the necessary technical input;
- discuss the process for monitoring IHR implementation;
- discuss strengths, weaknesses and specific features regarding the status of IHR implementation in the WHO European Region;
- discuss the mobilization of technical and financial resources required to fully implement the IHR;
- endeavour to match identified needs, gaps and priorities to support.

Expected outcomes

This meeting advocates for and provides an opportunity to discuss IHR implementation as a collective responsibility and to foster global health security, preparedness and response. It will serve to reinforce the roles and responsibilities of national, regional and global partners in improving and maintaining core capacities, in providing technical and financial support, and in fostering intersectoral collaboration within countries and cooperation between countries. The meeting is also expected to increase political and technical commitment and the allocation of resources for IHR implementation at national level and in bilateral and multilateral relations.

General programme

The first day of the meeting will target senior decision-makers from ministries of health to take stock of the IHR implementation process five years after their entry into force and after the milestone of 15 June 2012 has passed. Besides some evaluative discussions, there will be a chance to refine commitments and to identify partnerships.

The second day of the meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss technical capacity-related issues in more depth. Areas of specific focus will highlight remaining challenges throughout the Region. These focus areas will be addressed in technical presentations, country presentations and panel discussions. Invited speakers will play a central role during the meeting by illustrating challenges and opportunities in the IHR implementation process, based on examples of events and approaches in different countries. Monitoring and evaluation of the implementation process will also be considered.

Part of the meeting will be devoted to a “table top” exercise. This short exercise will allow participants to review existing coordination mechanisms both nationally and internationally in the event of a public health emergency.
Participants

Total: 100 to 150 participants

Target audience:

- Senior and technical representatives from States Parties in the WHO European Region (IHR national focal points, ministries of health, other sectors);
- Technical, strategic and financial partners (regional and global);
- WHO Secretariat (WHO headquarters, WHO Regional Office for Europe, WHO country offices).

Up to two individuals can be nominated per States Party, ideally professionals involved in policy-making and facilitating national IHR implementation and those who, on a daily basis, are in charge of national surveillance and response and/or of activities related to risk detection, risk assessment, risk communication and risk management.

Meeting arrangements

Venue: European Commission
Jean Monnet Building, Meeting room M6,
Plateau du Kirchberg, Rue Alcide de Gasperi, LU-2920 Luxembourg

Duration: 2 days

Dates: 26–27 February 2013

Simultaneous interpretation between English, French, German and Russian will be provided

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