



WHO experts assessing laboratory capacities in Iraq during mission. (Photo: WHO)

5 December 2019 – To improve the influenza surveillance system and overall national pandemic influenza preparedness in Iraq, WHO conducted a mission on 16–19 September

2019 to assess the country's influenza surveillance system and laboratory capacity and review potential sentinel surveillance sites.

Iraq has had a functioning influenza surveillance system as part of its well-established national surveillance system for severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) that operates out of 40 sites in all 18 governorates. It has also been sharing laboratory data through FluNet, an online platform used for influenza virological surveillance. However, the SARI sentinel sites do not follow WHO's standard influenza surveillance protocols and there is no proper monitoring of patient enrolment and testing.

As a result of the WHO mission, the Ministry of Health has agreed to establish two model SARI surveillance sites at Kadhmiya and Nu'man hospitals that will implement the WHO influenza surveillance protocols with technical support from WHO.

Iraq's National Influenza Centre is a key part of the surveillance system and was recognised by WHO in 2010. It supports national influenza surveillance activities for SARI, Middle East respiratory syndrome coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and other respiratory viruses with pandemic potential.

In addition to implementing a pandemic influenza preparedness work plan, the Ministry of Health is prioritizing the development of a national pandemic preparedness plan and a national One Health framework with technical support from WHO. The National Influenza Centre laboratory will also be developing a comprehensive plan outlining the support needed from WHO.

As well as providing the initial stock of laboratory supplies, reagents and materials to the National Influenza Centre, WHO will continue to support Iraq in training and capacity-building activities for the two surveillance sites and the Centre through developing guidelines, standard operating procedures and reporting tools. The Ministry of Health has committed to sharing influenza virus isolates with WHO collaborating centres, and WHO has agreed to facilitate this virus sharing.

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