



4 October 2015 -- The 62nd session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean opened on Monday evening, 5 October 2015, in Kuwait City. Working sessions will start the following morning. As WHO's governing body at the regional level, the Regional Committee consists of representatives of all 22 countries in the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region.

Under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Jaber Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah, Prime Minister of Kuwait, the opening session was inaugurated by Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General, Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, H.E. Dr Ali Al-Obaidy, Minister of Health of Kuwait.

The meeting will examine a range of important health issues representing priorities for the countries of the Region. More than 250 public health leaders and experts will participate in this event, including ministers of health, representatives of national, regional and international organizations, and experts from WHO's headquarters and Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

Members of the Regional Committee will review the annual report of the Regional Director, which highlights the collaborative work of the Regional Office and Member States during 2014 and the first half of 2015. It focuses on the major work undertaken in regard to the 5 strategic priorities endorsed by the Regional Committee in 2012: health systems strengthening towards universal health coverage; maternal and child health; prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases; health security and control of communicable diseases; and emergency preparedness and response.

The meeting will give special focus to emergency preparedness and response in light of the unprecedented increase of armed conflicts in the Region, which are putting enormous pressure on health systems and resulting in huge numbers of refugees. Around half of the world's refugees belong to Afghanistan, Iraq and the Syrian Arab Republic and are mostly hosted by four countries of the Region, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Lebanon and Pakistan.

In this regard, a panel discussion on ways to improve emergency response will be held on the 6 October. Panelists will include ministers and representatives of humanitarian agencies, and will be discussing how to find common ground to meet the health needs of conflict-affected populations. Ms Christy Feig, WHO Communications Director, will moderate the discussion.

The session will discuss global health security, with special emphasis on emerging infectious diseases. Preparedness and readiness to deal with these important health threats remain limited and variable across the Region. Participants will review regional and country experience with the ongoing MERS-CoV and H5N1 outbreaks and look at ways to strengthen national preparedness.

The session will discuss the progress and delays in meeting the obligations and requirements of the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR), which are of vital importance to global health security. Participants will review concerns over the limitations of the current mechanism for monitoring IHR implementation and discuss a new approach for the assessment and maintenance of capabilities for IHR.

The meeting will also discuss the challenges and priorities for improving medical education in the Region. Participants will review results of a recent survey of registered medical schools that helped to identify essential strategies for reforming medical education in and enhancing its contribution to health systems.

Also on the agenda of the Committee is a technical paper on scaling up mental health care. Participants will explore how to scale up mental health care and fill the treatment gap – the proportion of people who require care but do not receive treatment. The paper includes a regional framework that identifies the actions needed by Member States and partners to bridge the treatment gap and meet agreed targets and indicators.

During the last day of the meeting, participants will review resolutions and decisions of regional interest taken during the most recent sessions of the World Health Assembly and Executive Board. The closing session will take place in the afternoon of 8 October.

**Related link**

[62nd Session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean](#)

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