

KARACHI, 7 October 2011: “In view of the current flood crisis, World Health Organization (WHO) will be scaling up its humanitarian response in all the affected areas in Sindh to address the health issues faced by the population displaced by the floods. WHO is already working side by side with the Sindh provincial and district health authorities and health implementing partners to comprehensively address health problems, but more funds are urgently needed in order to save precious human lives.” This was stated by Dr. Guido Sabatinelli, the WHO Representative in Pakistan, while speaking to the provincial Secretary Health and other senior officers of the Health Department during his visit to Sindh that concluded yesterday.

A special mission comprised of senior technical experts of the WHO Country Office and Sindh provincial sub-office visited the WHO Humanitarian Hubs in Hyderabad and Sukkur to see and hear first-hand about the health impact of the flood emergency and the organization's operations throughout Sindh. They visited hospitals, health centers, nutrition stabilization centers, immunization sites and displaced persons in Hyderabad, Sukkur, and Larkana including Naudero, Garhi Khuda Bakhsh, and Community Midwives workstation in Village Katchi Unar.

WHO has been collaborating with the health authorities and implementing partners, to reduce the burden of preventable deaths and illness through life-saving interventions among flood-affected populations since the 2010 mega flood, but the current floods in South Pakistan and the poor donor response has stretched the capacity of the health authorities and the organization to address the factors contributing to the main mortality risks such as acute diarrhea, pneumonia, malaria, measles, malnutrition, and maternal and neo-natal mortality.

WHO's Emergency and Humanitarian Assistance (EHA) team has been focusing on the provision of essential primary health care and health services to the affected population; mitigation of communicable disease outbreaks through intensive surveillance and early response to disease threats; environmental health interventions including water quality analysis and treatment with priority given to schools and health institutions; health education informing the general public; ensuring the provision of emergency essential reproductive health services; and the treatment of acute malnutrition and nutritional surveillance.

The mission concluded that the conditions in which the flood-displaced persons are living in camps and temporary settlements is highly critical, with limited access to safe water and no functional sanitation facilities. WHO Communicable Disease Epidemiologist, Dr Rana Kakar, stated that “Overcrowding, inadequate hygiene and poor nutrition increase the vulnerability of

the affected population, and the situation continues to deteriorate with every passing day so that the risk of an overwhelming outbreak of waterborne disease is dangerously increased. Surveillance teams have already identified 57 outbreaks of diarrhea, but they were at an early stage where they could be controlled by prompt action.” During the investigations, more than 96% of the 294 water sources tested by WHO environmental health team were found contaminated. In response, WHO provided hygiene kits, Jerry cans, water filters, water disinfection tablets and hygiene information. In view of the threat of diarrhea and cholera, WHO has strengthened some hospitals to provide diarrhea care by provision of inpatient beds and medical supplies.

As many health facilities are still under water in Badin, Mirpurkhas and Sanghar, mobile teams are providing very basic health services. In other districts, health facilities serving the flood-affected people were also found to be highly unhygienic, due to lack of water and sanitation services. While 805,264 patient consultations have been reported, serious gaps exist in nutrition, and maternal, newborn and child health coverage, and immunization, not only in officially registered camps for displaced population but also for the rest of the population. Only 32% of health facilities in these districts have adequate stocks of medicines, vaccines, equipments and other consumables to last more than one week. WHO has provided essential medicines to Sindh flood-affected population directly or through its implementing partners to cover approximately 450,000 people but the needs are obviously greater.

In collaboration with health partners, WHO interventions are scaling up efforts of local health facilities to provide emergency essential reproductive health services including antenatal and postnatal care and developing referral mechanisms for them through social mobilization, training of female paramedics and provision of the necessary supplies and logistics. The nutritional needs of infants and very young children are being addressed through stabilization centres with provision of equipment and medicines and proper monitoring, particularly for the severely malnourished children.

In view of the emergency situation, WHO senior technical experts held a marathon meeting with the Sindh Health Secretary Mr Rizwan Ahmed and the top leadership of the Sindh Health Department including Special Secretary Health Dr Sikander Panhwar, Additional Secretary Development Dr Khalid Sheikh, Director General Dr Hafeez Memon to delineate the government - WHO biennial program for 2012 and 2013. The WHO's Country Cooperation Strategy for the next six years was also introduced including steps to be taken in the post-devolution scenario of the Health Sector. Mr Rizwan Ahmed strongly praised the efforts of WHO describing it as a trusted technical partner of the Government of Sindh.

Dr Jorge Martinez, WHO EHA Coordinator, described the donor response this year, “As of today, besides Norway which supports selected districts in Sindh, the USA, UK and Spain are the only donor countries which have pledged funds in support of WHO to assist the millions of flood affected Pakistanis. These donations account to only 9% of the funding needs of the health sector to properly response to the emergency”.

Monday 29th of April 2024 08:21:46 PM