

Globally, the world has experienced, and still faces, many public health crises of concern. This includes the:

- Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) in 2003
- Pandemic influenza caused by Influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 virus in 2009
- Cholera outbreak in Haiti in 2010
- *Escherichia (E.coli)* infection outbreak in Europe in 2011
- Novel coronavirus infection in humans in the Eastern Mediterranean Region in 2012.

The lessons learnt from these public health events are that they occur suddenly, spread rapidly and know no geographical boundary. The challenges posed by them require a coordinated response at local, national and global levels.

Under the International Health Regulations (2005), WHO Member States have committed to strengthening their national surveillance and response capacities, and support a global outbreak alert and response system as part of global health security.

Risk communication is one of the eight core capacities requirement of IHR (2005). The results from the core capacity assessment for IHR (2005) conducted in the Region, show that risk communication requires more attention and the risk communication response during health crises has been limited resulting in negative health, economic, social and political consequences.

Risk communication is no longer viewed as “one-way” and should be considered more broadly to facilitate an effective health response that avoids morbidity and fatalities from public health events.

In order to strengthen Member States capacity to develop and implement effective risk communication interventions, the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, in collaboration with WHO headquarters and Indiana University, USA, have developed a survey tool to assess national capacities for risk communication.

The key objectives of the tool are to:

- assess existing risk communication capacities in Member States
- identify capacity gaps and map possible measures to address those gaps
- provide evidence on the areas that Member States can strategically plan to meet IHR (2005) requirements and standards and so effectively respond to outbreaks and other types of health event of potential public health concern.

The tool looks at three key areas:

- organizational capacity including human resources, inter-institutional coordination, current risk and crisis communication capacities and national health emergency response capacities
- assessment of a list of required abilities
- organizational communication practices and the perceptions of both senders and recipients of information e.g. the information shared by senders and the actual information received by recipients.

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