A number of H1N1 suspected cases were admitted to Shaheed Hemin Hospital in Suleimaniya governorate on 25 December 2018.

13 February 2019 – Intercountry collaboration between Iraq and Jordan allowed WHO and health authorities in Iraq to rapidly and successfully respond to an increase in cases of acute respiratory infections.

The last week of November 2018 witnessed an alarming rise in the incidence of acute respiratory infections in Suleimaniya governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. By 31 December, more than 35 suspected cases of influenza were admitted to Shaheed Hemin Hospital for Internal Medicine in the governorate, but very few cases had undergone virology laboratory investigation due to the unavailability of the laboratory medium required to transfer the nasal-throat specimen to the National Public Health Laboratory in Baghdad.
WHO EMRO | WHO intercountry cooperation yields rich health dividends

An urgent package of viral transport medium arrived at Baghdad International Airport from Jordan on 25 December to respond to the rise in respiratory infection cases in Suleimaniya governorate.

“The increase in reported cases of influenza was very concerning,” said Dr Sabah Nasraddin Ahmed, Director General of Health in Suleimaniya governorate. “It required urgent investigation to isolate and identify the viral causing agent, but there was a severe shortage of the viral transport medium needed to collect and transport the specimens. Only 2 samples were sent to the public health laboratory in Baghdad, one of which was H1N1 positive, sounding an alarm for a potential disease outbreak in the governorate,” he added.

Health authorities immediately requested support from WHO in Iraq to procure the viral transport medium from accredited and accessible suppliers in Jordan.

“Despite the holiday season, WHO focal points in Iraq and Jordan coordinated immediately to facilitate the intercountry shipment and deliver the required supplies from Jordan to Iraq,” said Dr Adham Ismail, WHO Representative in Iraq. “Two days of intensive collaboration between WHO teams in Iraq and Jordan successfully ended with a ready-to-ship consignment of Viral Transport Medium delivered to Shaheed Hemin Hospital ward and Central Laboratory in Suleimaniya, and also distributed to other health directorates in all Iraqi governorates as preparedness measures.”

“This story is just one example of how joint action, collaborative spirit, and dedication of staff can result in successful inter-country cooperation, highlighting that health security knows no borders, and that a health threat in one country requires immediate support and commitment from neighbouring countries and the Region,” said Dr Maria Cristina Profili, WHO Representative in Jordan.

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WHO is a specialized public health organization mandated to provide the most reliable and evidence-based technical assistance, strategic and operational guidance to countries worldwide.

WHO works very closely with the Iraqi Ministry of Health and related sectors on a daily bases to identify priorities and guide the health sector on preparedness, effective and efficient response to health and health care requirements.

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