

Amman, 8 March 2013 – Prior to the crisis in Syria, more than 90% of medicines were locally produced. Since then, the effects of economic sanctions, currency fluctuations, difficulty in the availability of hard currency and an increase in operational costs have negatively affected the production of medicines and pharmaceutical products. The escalation of clashes has resulted in substantial damage to the pharmaceutical plants located in Aleppo and Rural Damascus governorates, where 90% of the country's plants are based. Many of the plants have reportedly been destroyed or are closed because the workers cannot access their work place. As a result, local production of medicines has been reduced by 90%. Additionally, the main government storage facility for imported medicines, which included most of the required needs for the first quarter of 2013, has been destroyed.

Assessments by WHO indicate that insulin, oxygen, anaesthetics, serums and intravenous fluids are no longer available inside Syria to meet needs, with health facilities and local pharmacies increasingly unable to provide medicines, particularly those for the continuous treatment of chronic diseases.

Until recently, WHO had been unable to assess the extent of damage to public health due to the lack of a reference pharmaceutical list assessed and validated by experts on the basis of WHO's Essential Medicines List. To overcome this obstacle, health experts from Syria and pharmaceutical experts and health professionals from WHO and Jordan met in Amman to address critical shortages in medicines and medical supplies inside Syria, resulting in an updated Essential Medicines List for the entire country.

Reflecting disease profiles, current gaps and critical needs, the list is an essential tool for enhancing the effectiveness of the international community's emergency health response by enabling projection and quantification of essential medicine requirements and the development of standard procurement procedures.

WHO has evaluated the needs for the next 12 months in terms of essential medicines, medical supplies, medical consumables and anti-cancer medicines, and estimated that these will require a minimum of US\$ 900 million. A list of the most urgently-needed and life-saving items has also been developed, containing 168 items (92 urgently needed essential medicines, 33 cancer medicines and 43 consumables) and estimated to require US\$ 467 million for 2013.



[Rana Al-Hadeim](#) [Yusuf al-Dabbas](#)