

WHO brought together more than 20 regional experts from eight countries of the Region to attend a WHO training course for in-country rapid response teams on field investigation and rapid response to respiratory outbreaks caused by a novel virus which was held in Muscat, Oman from 14 to 18 September 2014. As members of national rapid response teams, they were trained on early detection, field investigation and response to the outbreaks of respiratory infections due to novel respiratory agents or emerging infections. The emergence of two infectious disease threats - the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) in 2012 in our Region and the Ebola virus disease in West Africa in 2013-2014, demonstrates that a threat anywhere is a threat everywhere in this globalized world. It is hoped that this training strengthened the detection and investigation capacity for Ebola, particularly in the areas of surveillance and contact tracing, infection control in health care settings, as well as in field investigation should there be any suspected case in the country.

The establishment of in-country rapid response teams is part of a comprehensive event management system to enable countries to prepare better, respond faster and manage resources more effectively during disease outbreaks. They are a vital component of an emergency preparedness and response system at the national level. At the international level, the International Health Regulations (2005) or IHR provide a framework for WHO epidemic alert and rapid response activities in collaboration with countries to control international outbreaks.

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