



*Influenza experts from WHO and Libya’s Ministry of Health review a laboratory. (Photo: Amgad Elkholy/WHO).*

22 July 2018 - During the last two weeks of June, two teams of influenza experts from WHO were deployed to Libya and Djibouti at the invitation of the countries’ Ministries of Health. The purpose was to assess and improve the influenza surveillance system, laboratories, and capacity of rapid response teams (RRTs) to detect and respond early to any threat. Dr Abdinasir Abubakar, who led the WHO delegation to Djibouti, said: “In both countries our teams had a comprehensive set of objectives. This allows us to really move the needle and improve the state of national influenza surveillance system - saving lives as a result.”

In Libya, the experts found that surveillance systems were in place but not fully functioning, in

part due to the ongoing conflict. A shortage of laboratory supplies and reagents, not enough trained staff, and the absence of an electronic surveillance system all hampered the proper functioning of Libya's influenza surveillance. The security situation affected response capacity even more negatively: although 30 teams of Rapid Response health staff were active, their movement was often limited.

Djibouti health authorities for their part were eager to re-establish enhanced surveillance systems, which were originally set up in six places in 2014 but had become inactive since. However, the experts advised to reactivate only three sentinel sites to ensure optimal capacity and quality. As in Libya, Djibouti authorities and WHO experts also agreed on formulating a national influenza surveillance protocol. They further agreed to update the technical disease surveillance guide, share surveillance data with WHO's [FluID](#) and [EMFLU](#) databases, train health staff, establish collaboration between human and animal health surveillance systems, and finally perform a review of all these measures in one year's time.

Dr Amgad Elkholy, head of the Libya mission team, commented: "WHO's support to countries for better influenza surveillance, laboratory confirmation, and rapid response, makes a big difference in how many people get sick or die from influenza. These missions are building blocks, to help countries identify their gaps, and implement solutions - so that not one outbreak goes unnoticed."

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