



Participants of the intercountry meeting on the burden of seasonal influenza in Marrakech, Morocco. The WHO emerging and zoonotic disease programme organized an intercountry meeting on regional tools to estimate the burden of seasonal influenza in the Eastern Mediterranean Region” from 27 to 29 August 2012, in Marrakesh, Morocco. The meeting was attended by national influenza Focal Points, Directors of Communicable Disease Control Departments, epidemiologists from 17 countries of the Region, WHO staff from country offices, the Regional Office and headquarters, representatives of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and NAMRU-3, consultants from academia and representatives of the Ministries of Health of Pakistan, Sudan and the United Kingdom.

Influenza burden estimation tool

The main purpose of the meeting was to build consensus among countries of the Region on the importance of establishing national influenza programmes. The influenza burden estimation tool, which generates scientific evidence on the extent and burden of seasonal influenza, was introduced and the use of evidence in establishing national policies discussed.

During the meeting participants discussed the:

status of influenza surveillance and availability of surveillance information at the global and regional levels

rationale for estimation of the influenza burden

current situation and potential for expansion of the existing SARI network in the Region

surveillance systems of various countries and experiences in estimating the burden of seasonal

influenza

WHO manual for estimation of burden of disease associated with influenza and the flu burden model application.

Recommendations

The meeting concluded with a set of recommendations, which included a recommendation for WHO to establish a regional oversight committee for influenza disease burden with membership of all partners to provide technical support to Member States in advocacy and resource mobilization to establish national influenza programmes.

Countries were recommended to:

- establish/strengthen their influenza surveillance systems in general, and SARI surveillance, in particular, in accordance with the “WHO Global Epidemiological Surveillance Standards for Influenza”
- assess the quality of their existing influenza surveillance data and make necessary improvements in order to estimate the burden of disease using the standard methods described in the manual
- advocate for informed decision-making regarding establishment and/or evaluation of national influenza programmes
- take into consideration actions to be taken during special events, e.g. mass gatherings and large epidemics/pandemics.

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