Updates from UKHSA's International Health Regulations Strengthening Project (IHR-SP)

In this edition:

- Updates from the IHR-SP
- New resources on the IHR-SP Knowledge Hub
- Media round-up
- Wellbeing tip

Welcome!

This publication provides updates for the project's internal colleagues and external partners. If you have any queries, feedback or contributions please contact:
IHR.Programme@ukhsa.gov.uk

Alternatively, reach out to Lucy Trelfa, Senior Communications Manager:
Lucy.Trelfa@ukhsa.gov.uk

www.gph-ihrstrengthening.org  #IHR_Strengthening
IHR Strengthening Project Starts Work in Southeast Asia

The UKHSA’s IHR Strengthening Project (IHR-SP) has expanded its regional ways of working to include a new technical team based in Southeast Asia (SEA). Following 12 months of scoping work by the project senior leadership team and preparatory meetings with partners in the region, the project’s new regional technical experts are now in-post. The IHR-SP Lead for the SEA Region, Dr Ahmed Razavi, is based in Jakarta alongside the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat and the UK Mission to ASEAN. The SEA team as well as other IHR strengthening activities will support regional priorities agreed through the ASEAN Health Cluster on Responding to All Hazards and Emerging Threats, which includes providing input on the establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED).

The SEA team also has a presence in Bangkok, where a number of other international organisations have their regional headquarters. In September 2023, the SEA team and Head of IHR-SP, Dr Anne Wilson, gathered in Bangkok to meet with regional stakeholders and further scope prospective workstreams.

**Head of the IHR Strengthening Project, Dr Anne Wilson, said,** "It is fantastic that the IHR Strengthening Project has expanded its regional ways of working to Southeast Asia and that the team are now in post, commencing activities in the region. I am especially pleased to see how well our team has been received by ASEAN public health partners. Meetings with partners such as UNEP and FAO are an excellent chance to share ideas and identify opportunities to collaborate technically in the region, which underpins all the work we do across the IHR-SP. I'd like to thank our ASEAN and international partners for their positive engagement so far, and I look forward to working alongside regional public health networks going forward."

IHR-SP Technical Experts Support ASEAN Workshop for Risk Assessment and Risk Communication in Emergencies

With the support from the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA)’s technical expertise in the International Health Regulations Strengthening Project (IHR-SP) and Canada’s Weapon Thread Reduction Program (WTRP) funding, the ASEAN Secretariat conducted a workshop on Risk Assessment and Risk Communication (RARC) from 23-26 October 2023 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Attended by 83 participants from Ministries of Health and relevant government institutions, the workshop was aimed at enhancing the capacity of ASEAN member states to assess risks and communicate them in the event of emergency.

The workshop presented speakers from UKHSA and WHO to elaborate on fundamentals of toxicology and exposure assessment, as well as risk characterization, management and assessment. The session was continued with discussion on communication aspects and multi-agency coordination.
Case study: Co-creating ‘community of practice’ microbiology networks in partnership with Zambian Ministry of Health

The UK Health Security Agency’s (UKHSA) International Health Regulations Strengthening Project (IHR-SP) provides technical assistance to strengthen compliance with the IHR in Zambia. The IHR laboratory systems strengthening component includes laboratory capacity building in areas such as laboratory diagnostics, quality management systems, biosafety and biosecurity, and leadership.

Building on existing capabilities and activities previously delivered by the UKHSA IHR-SP microbiology team at the request of one hospital laboratory in the Copperbelt Province, a gap was identified in ongoing mentorship for microbiology more widely in other hospitals in the Province. Working closely with the Zambian Ministry of Health (MOH) to co-identify areas of potential development, a provincial ‘community of practice’ network initiative was launched for pilot.

In February 2022, the MOH established the Copperbelt Microbiology Team (CBMT) to strengthen clinical and public healthcare outcomes in Zambia by providing further training and mentorship on identified areas of need, with technical expertise provided by IHR-SP. CBMT is formed of 29 microbiology laboratory scientists from across five level 3 MOH hospital laboratories in the Copperbelt province. The network meets monthly on a virtual basis, and quarterly in-person with the UKHSA team for co-delivered mentorship meetings.

The CBMT network has been found to have changed microbiology practices at an organisational and provincial level. Recognising this, in November 2022 the MOH expressed a request to expand the network to other provinces within Zambia. In February 2023, the IHR-SP received a request from scientists within the Southern provinces of Zambia, and subsequently, the Southern Province Microbiology Team (SPMT) was formed.

During face-to-face network meetings, participants are encouraged to reflect on their learning from previous mentorship meetings and share positive changes in their microbiology practices as a result of the network activity. Specific areas of improvement highlighted by the participants included harmonisation of Standard Operating Procedures, improved implementation of biosafety risk assessments, improved microbiological techniques and method verification, quality control and biosecurity and biosafety measures.

Read the full case study on the Hub
IHR Strengthening Project attends UKHSA conference and International Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA) in Zambia

UKHSA conference
The UKHSA conference took place at Leeds Royal Armouries in November. Over 1,500 delegates attended, engaging with five keynote sessions, 34 parallel sessions, over 40 exhibitors, with content driven by almost 500 abstracts.

IHR-Strengthening Project team members contributed three e-posters to the conference, covering integrated disease surveillance worldwide, poison centre advocacy and capacity building to improve global chemical surveillance and response, and developing environmental public health capacity in Zambia.

Lukeki Kaindama, IHR-SP’s One Health Technical Expert was a panellist on the ‘One planet, one health: our future’ plenary session. This session explored the interdisciplinary world of One health and One Medicine, with a focus on the relationship between animal and human health and how a one Health approach could change approaches to health protection.

International Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA)
In November, team members from the IHR-SP, the third International Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA). This year’s conference was hosted in Zambia by the African Union and Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) in partnership with Zambia’s Ministry of Health and the Zambia National Public Health Institute, under the theme ‘Breaking barriers: repositioning Africa in the global health architecture’.

This year’s CPHIA was a doubly exciting and busy event for IHR-SP in-country team based in Lusaka, Zambia. Alongside our international partners, the IHR-SP Zambia team and our UK-based subject matter experts co-designed, delivered or supported multiple side events across the conference. The first day of the conference provided Zambia team members an opportunity to showcase our co-development of two new modules for Zambia’s Field Epidemiology Training Programme (FETP), covering environmental epidemiology presented by Jones Chibuye, Chemical and Environmental Hazards Technical Advisor, and workforce development, presented by Carol Mufana, Workforce Development Advisor, with Zambia’s Country Lead Ashley Sharp offering his thoughts on the panel discussion. Carol spoke again at a session on strengthening multi-sectoral response and governance to efficiently manage public health threats.

Dingase Mvula, Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response Technical Advisor, shared her expertise and experiences in Zambia during a cholera symposium exploring strategies for prevention and control, whilst Olusola Aruna, Nigeria Country Lead, moderated an Africa CDC session on championing sustainable financing for enhanced health security. One notable event was the launch of the Africa CDC strategic plan to establish functional PHEOCs in 90% of member states in the Africa and Eastern Mediterranean regions – a partnership IHR-SP plays a key role in, and Neil Squires, Director of Global Operations, spoke on the panel.

Neil Squires said, “It has been fantastic to see first-hand the breadth of expertise UKHSA contributes to the international knowledge base, the recognition from our partners, and importantly, the impact these partnerships can achieve in strengthening health security in Africa and beyond.

“I am very proud of the teams, their achievements and positive impact.”
Social Media Round Up

See our full social media celebration of One Health Day on X

Global Health Security, DHSC UK - Nov 3

Excellent coverage of international OneHealth activity from our partners at @UKHSA including great work across Nigeria, Zambia, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia from our #UKHRST and #IHRStrengthening projects.

Wellbeing Update

Get your flu vaccination

The national Covid 19 and flu vaccine programme has already started. All staff who do not already meet NHS Flu vaccination criteria, can request a flu vaccine voucher. Find out more on the UKHSA Pulse Occupational Health flu page.

Find out more about the flu vaccination: who should have it and why on GOV.UK

Stress Awareness Day

Stress Awareness Day took place in November so we’re exploring what you can do to manage stress and how UKHSA can support you.

Stress is your body’s natural way of responding to demands or perceived threats. Low-level stress can be helpful and motivate you to perform well under pressure. However, too much stress can affect your mood, health, and relationships.

There are things you can do to help cope with stressful events, feeling stressed, and burnout. Learn more about the signs and symptoms of stress at NHS Choices and Mind, the mental health charity, or take the Charity for Civil Servants’ stress test.

Read the IHR-SP highlights from CPHIA 2023 on X

UK Health Security Agency - Nov 3

This week, some of our global health teams are at @CPHIA_AfricaCDC to hear the latest on health and science in Africa, and align on ways forward for creating more resilient health systems across the continent.

#CPHIA2023 #IHRStrengthening #UKHRST

Watch Dr Sola’s video about our support for the ongoing diphtheria outbreak in Nigeria

WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Medit Office - Oct 24

WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Medit Office - Oct 24

In the wake of the ongoing Diphtheria outbreak in Nigeria, Dr. @solaoluwa, Country Lead for the @UKHSA’s #IHRStrengthening Project, talks about #UKAid-funded support in developing and strengthening Diphtheria Laboratory Diagnosis in 🇳🇬.

Wellbeing Update

Get your flu vaccination

The national Covid 19 and flu vaccine programme has already started. All staff who do not already meet NHS Flu vaccination criteria, can request a flu vaccine voucher. Find out more on the UKHSA Pulse Occupational Health flu page.

Find out more about the flu vaccination: who should have it and why on GOV.UK

Stress Awareness Day

Stress Awareness Day took place in November so we’re exploring what you can do to manage stress and how UKHSA can support you.

Stress is your body’s natural way of responding to demands or perceived threats. Low-level stress can be helpful and motivate you to perform well under pressure. However, too much stress can affect your mood, health, and relationships.

There are things you can do to help cope with stressful events, feeling stressed, and burnout. Learn more about the signs and symptoms of stress at NHS Choices and Mind, the mental health charity, or take the Charity for Civil Servants’ stress test.