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-SP facilitate the first meeting of public health labs network in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan

Since 2016, the IHR-SP in Pakistan has been providing technical and logistical support to national and provincial public health reference labs to develop linkages to strengthen diagnostic testing, reference testing and disease surveillance. In November 2023, the IHR-SP in collaboration with the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provincial health department hosted a one day meeting of provincial and regional public health reference labs. The objective of the meeting was to discuss the status and functions of public health labs with special focus on testing capacity, human resource, budget, technical capacity along with challenges and opportunities to strengthen Integrated Disease Surveillance & Response (IDSR) in the province.

The meeting was chaired by the Director General Health Services, KP and co-chaired by the Director Provincial Public Health Reference Laboratory (PPHRL) with technical support from IHR-SP in-country advisors. The Director of PPHRL highlighted the progress the labs had made since its inception in terms of pathogen testing capacity, list of priority pathogens, genome sequencing, quality assurance schemes and labs information & management systems. He also shared the current challenges of PPHRL in terms of resources (human and financial).

One by one, the regional labs also mentioned their current functions and updated the forum on status of current problems threatening to halt the progress of regional labs. After the discussions, the action points were compiled in three thematic areas, covering governance, sustainability and lab information systems.

The IHR-SP will work with provincial health department and provincial public health reference labs to initiate the lab assessments process to identify the specific needs of each lab. The IHR-SP IT subject matter expert and in-country team will also support the public health reference labs to establish a Labs Information & Management System (LIMS).
Building Capacities and Forging Partnerships: 
UKHSA IHR Strengthening Project’s Quantum Geographic Information System Training Propels State Epidemiologists in Nigeria

In a strategic effort to address competency gaps in data analysis and use of mapping software identified among State Epidemiologists in Nigeria, based on a 2022 assessment of their learning needs, the UKHSA IHR-SP collaborated with the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (NCDC), the World Health Organization, and Ehealth Africa to design and implement a Quantum Geographic Information System (QGIS) training programme.

The training successfully achieved two key objectives. Firstly, it showcased the tangible results of the support provided by UKHSA (formerly known as Public Health England) in 2019 when it trained three data managers from NCDC in QGIS for geospatial analysis. This earlier investment had now empowered NCDC staff to co-facilitate QGIS training with UKHSA, Ehealth Africa and WHO. Secondly, the training aimed to transfer geospatial analysis capacity using QGIS to the subnational levels of health administration in Nigeria.

During the training, the Director General of the NCDC, Dr. Ifedayo Adetifa, emphasized the significance of acquiring skills in geospatial analysis and map utilization for State Epidemiologists. Dr. Adetifa expressed gratitude to UKHSA for conducting the assessment that led to the training and for promptly addressing the identified needs.

On the final day, participants applied their learning by creating individual epidemiological reports for their respective states, committing to sustaining monthly dissemination to stakeholders. Dr. Olusola Aruna, the Country Lead of the UKHSA IHR Strengthening Project in Nigeria, commended participants for their active engagement and highlighted the growing partnership between the NCDC and subnational entities.

The UKHSA’s IHR-SP is committed to supporting NCDC’s effort in strengthening the capacity of the various states ministries of health in Nigeria to analyse and utilize epidemiological data through mentorship and periodic refresher trainings that will sustain the gain of this training.
IHR-SP facilitates One Health Joint Risk Assessment Workshop Held in Lusaka, Zambia

From the 5th to 8th December 2023, Zambia National Public Health Institute (ZNPHI) in collaboration with UKHSA’s International Health Regulations Strengthening Project (IHR-SP) and the UN Quadripartite (FAO, UNEP, WHO and WOAH) held a Joint Risk Assessment Operational Tool (JRA OT) workshop in Lusaka Zambia. The JRA OT enables countries to apply a One Health approach to assessing and addressing complex health threats at the human – animal – environment interface. It is one of the operational tools developed by the UN Quadripartite to support countries to assess risks in a standardised and multisectoral way.

The aim of the JRA OT workshop was to build capacity of One Health stakeholders in Zambia to:

- apply the standardized 10-step process of joint risk assessments for priority endemic and emerging threats at the human – animal- environment interface
- identify the current gaps
- recommend approaches for control of these threats
- reach a multi-sectoral consensus on achievable management options and communication messages that are relevant to the country context.

The workshop was targeted at technical experts with experience in the control and management of zoonotic diseases in Zambia from the Ministries of Health, Fisheries and Livestock, Department of National Parks and Wildlife, and the Ministry of the Green Economy and Environment.

Led by IHR-SP and the UN Quadripartite, the first day of the workshop was a training day to equip a small group of local facilitators with the principles of the joint risk assessment process to build capacity in-country. These participants will then form the core technical committee who can carry out JRAs in the future and will be able to train others in Zambia to carry out the JRA process.

By the end of the workshop, the full JRA process was conducted using a One Health approach. Three reports were produced covering recommendations made by the multi-sectoral group of experts for each of the prioritised zoonoses; anthrax, rabies and avian influenza. The JRA results will now incorporate these into existing and future outbreak responses.

Read the full story on the Hub
In a significant advancement for the UKHSA's International Health Regulations Strengthening Project Pakistan country team, in partnership with national and international collaborators, a collaborative and comprehensive roadmap for Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) Phase 2 implementation has been co-developed, marking a milestone in shaping the future of IDSR in Pakistan.

This roadmap is a continuation of IDSR Phase 1 document, developed in 2016 by Dr Anne Wilson, Head of IHR-SP, and has been meticulously crafted to include insights from evaluations such as the International Association of National Public Health Institutes (IANPHI) deep dive exercise and Joint External Evaluation (JEE) assessment in 2016 and 2023. These evaluations, alongside lessons learnt from the IDSR cascade training and National IDSR Review Workshops have been instrumental in shaping this strategic plan.

The roadmap is based on eight objectives, focusing on areas including governance, core surveillance functions, Public Health Laboratory capacities and IT infrastructure. There is a strong emphasis on multi-sectoral collaboration, integration of vertical data systems and developing human resources capacities at multiple levels.

The process of developing this roadmap has been as collaborative as its content. Initially conceptualised and drafted by UKHSA’s IHR-SP Pakistan Country lead and wider in-country experts, a technical team of Officials from the National Institute of Health (NIH) also inputted into the roadmap and shared their feedback.

Considering the importance of the provincial and regional health departments’ ownership, provincial and regional public health experts were invited to attend a three day consultative workshop under the leadership of NIH, to review the document methodically and provide feedback. This collaborative and inclusive approach has ensured that the final roadmap, represents collective thoughts and joint efforts. At the end of the workshop, the roadmap was agreed at federal and provincial level. The next step is for the NIH at federal level to issue this agreed document to all IDSR stakeholders both government bodies and development partners, through government agreed process.

It is pertinent to highlight the timeliness and strategic significance of this roadmap in guiding the five year National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPS) 2023 - 2028, which is currently under development by the National Health Ministry following the JEE in 2023. The development of this IDSR roadmap prior to formulation of NAPS ensures that its actions, especially in areas of Surveillance, Response and Public Health Labs (PHLs) are aligned with that of the Phase 2 IDSR Roadmap. The roadmap document, therefore, stands as a significant milestone in IDSR journey and is a clear demonstration of UKHSA's IHR-SP Pakistan team's dedication to establish IDSR across the country.

Read the story on the Hub
Social Media Round Up

A selection of recent appearances of the IHR Strengthening Project in the media. Please click the items to view the posts.

See the full thread of activity from UKHSA Director General for Health Protection Operations, Oliver Munn’s visit to Zambia

UK Health Security Agency @UKHSA • Dec, 11, 2023

Last week, hosted by our @IHR_Strengthening Project team in Zambia, our Director General for Health Protection Operations, Oliver Munn, visited several partner public health institutions to see first-hand their great work, protecting the public against health threats.

Tropical Diseases Research Centre – Ndola

TropicalDRC Ndola

Today, @TDRC Ndola was honoured to welcome a delegation from @UKHSA. The visit emphasized our joint commitment to enhancing microbiology services in Zambia. #IHR_strengthening @moHbZambia @nkwlecley @langershomic

UK Health Security Agency & 8 others

UK in Nigeria 🇳🇬 @UKinNigeria • Dec, 8, 2023

This week, @UKHSA #IHR_Strengthening Project & @NCDCgov wrapped up the 2nd round of training for the National Reference Laboratory & its network on the new ISO15169:2022 standard. This sets the stage for public health labs to align with this international #QMS standard.

UK Health Security Agency @UKHSA • Dec, 19, 2023

Great to have our #IHR_Strengthening team support @EPHIEthiopia & @AfricaCDC with last week’s simulation exercise with the Ethiopia National Chemical Biological and Radioclean Technical Working Group, to help strengthen public health responses to chemical threats. Read more

Ethiopian Public Health Institute @EPHIEthiopia • Dec, 5, 2023

EPHI’s PHEM conducted Ethiopia National Chemical Biological and Radioclean Technical Working Group Simulation Exercise from December 4 - 5 here in EPHI’s Training Center with support from UK Health Security & CDC Africa. m.facebook.com/story.php?stor...

#IHR_Strengthening
New Mental Health First Aiders in IHR-SP

Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAiders) are UKHSA staff volunteers who are trained to identify, understand, and help you if you are going through a difficult time. When you need to talk, they will listen, reassure, and signpost you to the appropriate services.

Five additional IHR-SP team members recently took up the training, bringing our total of IHR-SP MHFAiders to six. Our MHFAiders are:

Jennifer Ankrah, Andrei Hulub, Beverly Marks, Addis Taye and Jenny White.

Thank you for looking out for our team and wider UKHSA colleagues!

All conversations with MHFAiders will remain confidential unless there is any indication of harm to oneself or someone else. In these cases, the issue will be appropriately escalated to an UKHSA safeguarding officer or emergency services.

You may prefer to reach out to someone you don't know. You can look on the Mental Health First Aiders Page for the network list, look out for the MHFAider signature in peoples’ emails or filter for ‘Mental Health First Aider’ on the People’s Page on Pulse.

Other resources for managing your mental health at UKHSA include:

- contacting the employee assistance programme on 0800 882 4102 or by emailing counsellingteam@pamassist.co.uk
- visiting the mental health support page or the managing stress page
- using the wellbeing check in template with your line manager or filling out a Wellness Action Plan together to manage your mental health at work.

UKHSA also has a variety of peer support networks that you can join to connect with others who might be going through similar situations. You can also review our inclusion and health and wellbeing networks to see if there's any you would like to join.

If you are managing a colleague going through an acute mental health concern, you can review the guidance.

Find more health and wellbeing resources on Pulse or by contacting wellbeing@ukhsa.gov.uk.