WHO’s Health Security (HS) cluster responds to the need for new approaches in addressing complex and emerging threats to global public health security. Issues such as epidemic preparedness and response, animal and foodborne diseases, and natural and man-made disasters, have accentuated health vulnerability within a globalized and interconnected world. The International Health Regulations (IHR) provide a framework for the cluster’s action as well as a basis for international cooperation in strengthening capacity for risk detection and management.

Mass gatherings

Mass Gatherings (MGs) are events attended by a sufficient number of people to potentially strain the public health resources of a community, state or nation. MGs are an opportunity for lasting positive legacies for health but can also introduce new and challenging risks that need to be managed.

- **MGs place additional pressures**
  - Health systems must operate for the duration of the mass gatherings at surge capacity under intense media scrutiny.
  - Business-as-usual health services may be difficult or impossible to implement.
  - Increase in the possibility of emergencies resulting in a large number of casualties.
  - Coordination and cooperation across multiple agencies/sectors.
  - Introduction and transmission of infectious disease.
  - International dimensions of some events (languages, cultures, etc.) increase the complexity of risk communication.
  - Perceived increased risk of deliberate action against MGs.

- **WHO mass gathering tools**
  - Health advice for travelers to MGs.
  - The Virtual Interdisciplinary Advisory Group on Mass Gathering (VIAG).

- **Lasting positive legacy in the form of:**
  - Strengthened public health system.
  - Improved medical and hospital services.
  - An improved living environment.
  - Increased public health awareness.

- **Mass gatherings Collaborating Centre Network**
  - Flinders University Disaster Research Centre (FUDRC), Australia.
  - Public Health England, United Kingdom.
  - National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD), South Africa.
  - Institute of Public Health of Vojvodina, Serbia.
  - School of Public Health, University of Washington, United States of America.
  - Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia.
| Management of risks                          | The Preparedness and Mass Gathering (PMG) team within the Global Preparedness, Surveillance and Response Operations unit (PSR) works with MG planners to develop the necessary health measures for managing acute public health risks associated with mass gatherings. PMG oversees the development of scientific knowledge and tools for planning MGs and coordinates a network of WHO Collaborating Centres on MGs. It also assists with risk assessment and enhanced media surveillance through the Hazard Detection and Risk Assessment, and can assist host countries with organizing surveillance systems for pre-MG planning. |
| Global alert and response systems           | The Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN) coordinates response with technical partners and agencies, and provides expert technical advice and support to countries during public health emergencies. |
| Influenza pandemic preparedness             | The Emerging and Dangerous Pathogens team coordinates and, if needed, can activate the EDP Laboratory Network for Response and Readiness (EDPLN) in the event of severe disease due to a novel, emerging or acute endemic threat requiring high security diagnostic laboratories. |
| Chemical and radiation threats              | The Global Influenza Programme provides technical expertise for detection, risk assessment and preparedness and control of influenza events (outbreaks, epidemics, pandemics). |
| Emergency and Disaster Risk Management      | The Emergency Risk Management and Humanitarian Response department (ERM) supports countries in developing health emergency and disaster risk management capacities, health facility safety and preparedness, and in the instance of a major event, liaises with respective WHO Regional Office counterparts and partners on risk assessment, planning and response. |
| Laboratory capacity                         | The Laboratory Strengthening and Biorisk Management team provides support to laboratory capacity, quality and biorisk management, as well as on the transport of infectious substances. |
| Points of Entry                             | The IHR Ports Airports & Ground Crossings team provides guidance in the area of transportation and points of entry, and gives specific advice on public health capacity building and event management on board conveyances and at ports, airports and ground crossings, throughout the duration of an MG. |
| Travel health                               | The International Travel and Health group supports the preparation of travel health advices including guidance on recommended or required vaccination. |
| Food Safety                                 | The Food Safety and Zoonoses department provides technical assistance in risk assessment, management and communication of food safety issues prior to and during an MG, and assists with building national food safety capacity and health promotion campaigns. |
| Health Promotion                            | The Prevention of Non-communicable Diseases department develops strategies, provides assistance and guidelines to ensure and support that mass gatherings promote healthy behaviors. It also assists MGs to be tobacco free and, where appropriate, to include a physical legacy. |
| The Management of Substance Abuse unit     | The Management of Substance Abuse unit provides technical advice and policy suggestions on prevention and management of substance use (e.g. alcohol and drug use) and its consequences at MGs. |
| Health promotion                            | WHO also provides host countries/municipalities with impact assessment (IA) tools and frameworks. IA tools can be used early in the planning process to anticipate environmental and health impacts of infrastructure and urban development investments required for the MGs and to ensure a lasting and positive legacy. |

**WHO’s Interdepartmental Mass Gathering Group**

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