Editorial

- Japan earthquake and nuclear concerns

The recent earthquake and nuclear accidents in Japan were a disturbing wake-up call to the international community. While the events in Japan remained local, they are a tragic reminder of how closely linked we are, from one country to another, from region to region, and how much work we must do to be prepared not only to deal with a potential future pandemic and other epidemic-prone diseases, but also for nuclear and chemical accidents, and environmental disasters. The devastating events in Japan also remind us of the need for global coordination, support and solidarity.

As part of the response efforts in Japan, WHO HQ is working in close collaboration with the Japanese authorities, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and WHO West Pacific Regional Office and its global network of experts, at the highest level of the organizations, to gather updated information and best risk assessment results. The work of WHO is supported by a global network comprising more than 40 specialized institutions in radiation emergency medicine.

There are no health risks thus far to people living in other countries from radioactive material released into the atmosphere from the Japanese nuclear power plants. Radiation levels measured to date in other countries are far below the level of background radiation that most people are exposed to in normal, everyday circumstances. The situation is monitored on a daily basis and the Japanese authorities, WHO and other partners involved in the response, continue to work closely together.

Throughout this emergency, we have been asked, "Is IHR at work? Has IHR been set in motion?". The answer is yes. Although the events in Japan remain local, IHR has been involved from the start, closely monitoring developments to be ready to take timely and appropriate action as needed working with its partners in the travel and transport sector to ensure that no inappropriate travel restrictions were imposed and facilitating a harmonized approach at points of entry.

The IHR provide not only the legal framework but also a unique opportunity for the international community to work closely together to be better prepared to respond collectively to potential public health events that threaten our global health security. For WHO, they are an opportunity to strengthen and improve activities we have been doing in different departments and in the regions for many years. There is much work to be done, and at HQ we are committed to supporting the regional offices to better help countries strengthen their core capacities for preparedness and response to public health events.

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Daily situation updates on the Japan nuclear concerns are available on the WHO home page:
www.who.int
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1 The six WHO regional offices: AFRO – Regional Office for Africa; EMRO – Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean; EURO – Regional Office for Europe; PAHO/AMRO – Pan American Sanitary Bureau/Regional Office for the Americas; SEARO – Regional Office for South-East Asia; WPRO – Regional Office for the Western Pacific.
WHAT’S NEW IN IHR COORDINATION AND SUPPORT

▪ Fourth meeting of the IHR Review Committee
The assessment of the global response to the pandemic H1N1 is conducted by the International Health Regulations Review Committee, a committee of experts with a broad mix of scientific expertise and practical experience in public health. The members are some of the leading experts in the world in their respective fields. The fourth meeting of the Committee took place at WHO Headquarters in Geneva on 28 March 2011 to review the preview report. The final report of the Committee will be presented to the World Health Assembly in May 2011. The preliminary report and reports from the Committee's meetings can be found at the IHR web site, where the transcript of the press briefing with Dr Harvey Fineberg, Chair of IHR Review Committee held 28 March 2011 is available in print and audio files.
www.who.int/ihr/review_committee/en/index.html

▪ Meeting on IHR core capacities development and monitoring
The meeting on IHR core capacities and monitoring was held in Geneva, Switzerland, 29 March 2011 and brought together IHR regional focal points and HQ technical focal points supporting countries to meet the core capacity requirements by 2012. The objectives were to review current WHO activities to support countries to meet the requirements under each of the 13 core capacities -- legal issues, coordination, surveillance, response, preparedness, laboratory capacity, risk communication, human resources strengthening, ports, airports and ground crossings, radiological and nuclear events, chemical events, food safety, and animal health -- and identify priorities and activities that HQ should do to better support the regions to reach the requirements.

▪ Japan earthquake and nuclear concerns: International coordination at points of entry
In addition to collaboration with the Japanese authorities, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and WPRO and its global network of experts, to support the response in Japan WHO HQ has set up a coordination group with international travel and transport organizations for matters specific to air transport and tourism. This group includes the Airport Council International (ACI), the International Air Transport Association (IATA), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Regular updates are posted on PAGnet, an internet-based network that brings together public health officials at points of entry and partners to coordinate public health activities at ports, airports and ground crossings, including those related to public health emergency preparedness and response affecting international travel and transport: www.pagnet.info/news

▪ IHR course: Now accepting applications
The third IHR implementation course is now accepting applications. The objectives of the course are to strengthen critical human resources engaged to set-up and manage systems for securing global public health under the IHR implementation framework, and to develop communication capacities for efficient international collaboration. Since March 2010, the first and second courses have allowed 54 public health professionals from 39 countries improving their competencies in a variety of areas related to IHR implementation. These professionals mainly belong to national IHR focal points (NFP), but also to other related sectors. Each cohort of participants also includes WHO staff from country offices and regional offices. Overall, the participants have highly recognized the quality of the course and valued experience-sharing with professionals from various backgrounds and contexts. They are part of a network of professionals that share practical experience and solutions in the face of today’s public health challenges. www.who.int/ihr/training/ihrcourse/en/index.html
• **Risk communication meeting**
The IHR working group for risk communication and capacity building held in Lyon, France, from 16 to 18 March 2011, brought together 30 participants from around the world representing WHO regional offices, Member States, UN agencies, regional bodies, academic institutions and NGOs. Given the deadline of 2012 for all countries to achieve their IHR core capacity obligations, the meeting used the data from the recent (2010) IHR core capacity self-assessment questionnaire to set the stage for identifying efficient and effective strategies and plans for 2011-2012. For further information: ihrinfo@who.int

• **Travel and transport: Informal consultation meeting on a strategic approach on human resources development and training to support IHR implementation at points of entry**
The objective of this meeting held in Lyon, France, on 16 and 17 February 2011, was to discuss a strategic approach for human resources development and training to support IHR implementation at points of entry. Discussions focused on sharing best practice and lessons learned through global, regional and individual country experiences with PoE training, identifying priorities for implementation and proposals for the best way forward. For further information: ihrpapr@who.int

• **Checklist and indicators for monitoring progress in the development of IHR core capacities in States Parties**
The revised version of the IHR monitoring framework has been released and is available online. This reference document proposes a framework and processes for States Parties to monitor the development of their core capacities at the national, intermediate and local community/primary response: [www.who.int/ihr/IHR_Monitoring_Framework_Checklist_and_Indicators.pdf](http://www.who.int/ihr/IHR_Monitoring_Framework_Checklist_and_Indicators.pdf)

• **International Travel and Health – 2011 edition**
This annual publication explains how travellers can stay healthy, and provides WHO guidance on vaccinations, malaria chemoprophylaxis and treatment, personal protection against insects and other disease vectors, and safety in different environmental settings. It covers all the principal risks to travellers' health, both during their journeys and at their destinations. It describes all relevant infectious diseases, including their causative agents, modes of transmission, clinical features and geographical distribution, and provides details of prophylactic and preventive measures. This book is intended for the medical and public health professionals who advise travellers, but it is also a standard reference for travel agents, airlines and shipping companies - and for travellers themselves. It can be ordered online through WHO publications [http://apps.who.int/bookorders/francais/detart2.jsp?sesslan=2&codlan=1&codcol=18&codcch=11](http://apps.who.int/bookorders/francais/detart2.jsp?sesslan=2&codlan=1&codcol=18&codcch=11) The content of the book as well as pdf and e-Book versions in English and French will be available on the WHO ITH web site ([www.who.int/ith](http://www.who.int/ith)) as of mid April 2011.

**WHAT'S NEW IN RISK AND DISEASE CONTROL**

• **Japan earthquake and nuclear events**
WHO headquarters is working in close collaboration with the Japanese authorities, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and WPRO and its global network of experts, at the highest levels of the organizations after the earthquake and the nuclear events in Japan. Luckily there have thus far not been any risks for people living in other countries from radioactive material released into the atmosphere from the Japanese nuclear power plants. Radiation levels measured to date in other countries are far below the level of background radiation that most people are exposed to in normal, every day circumstances. The situation is monitored on a daily basis and the Japanese authorities, WHO and other partners involved in the response, continue to work closely together. Read updates and background information on the situation in Japan, here: [http://www.who.int/hac/crises/jpn/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/hac/crises/jpn/en/index.html)
• **Vector surveillance at points of entry**
An informal consultation meeting on vector surveillance at points of entry was held in Pingxiang, China from 28 February to 1 March 2011. The goal of the meeting was to initiate the development of a web-based global points of entry vector identification platform, as well as to develop an initial draft of WHO technical guidance for vector surveillance and control plans at points of entry. This aims at building a sustainable network for vector identification, remote-laboratory support, global database for vector entomology, morphology and ecology, information sharing, knowledge and skill delivering, etc. among States Parties. This work is a cooperation between the IHR Department, the Vector Ecology and Management unit of the Department of Control Neglected Tropical Diseases as well as the WHO regional offices and States Parties. The informal consultation was arranged with support from the Chinese General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ). For further information: ihrpag@who.int

• **Infectious Substances Shipping Training (ISSST) – 2011 edition**
The course on Infectious Substances Shipping Training addresses the classification, documentation, marking, labelling, packaging of infectious substances, and the preparation of shipments requiring the use of dry ice. The transport of infectious substances is strictly regulated, and training is required. This course contributes to improving compliance with applicable regulations ensuring protection of staff, the public and the environment. Compliance with applicable requirements also significantly increases access to courier and carrier services, and subsequent timely package delivery. www.who.int/ihr/i_s_shipping_training/en/index.html

• **New documents from Global Alert and Response**
  **Responsible life sciences research for global health security**
  16 December 2010

  **Sri Lanka – Communicable disease epidemiological profile**
  5 January 2011

  **Public health risk assessment and interventions**
  The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya: Civil unrest
  8 March 2011

  **Gestion des épidémies de méningite en Afrique**
  Guide de référence rapide à l’intention des autorités sanitaires et des soignants
  22 mars 2011

**WHAT’S NEW IN THE WHO REGIONS**

• **EMRO: Evaluation of training needs in epidemiology in Morocco**
WHO is collaborating with the Moroccan Ministry of Health to assess the needs for epidemiological training among the staff working at regional and peripheral levels. The purpose is to map the current human resources in this surveillance system, evaluate the impact of epidemiological training already received and identify the gaps. The project should also suggest ways to provide training in applied epidemiology. The work started with a survey targeting all 16 Moroccan regions followed by a visit to a selected number of Moroccan regions in January 2011. Future plans include establishing a strategic plan for training in epidemiology and developing training curricula.
SEARO: Bhutan: Core capacity assessment at points of entry
A core capacity assessment mission was carried out in Bhutan from 12 to 22 March 2011 at selected points of entry: Paro international airport and Phuentsholing Bhutan-India ground crossing. The assessment was carried out by the Ministry of Health in Bhutan, in collaboration with SEARO, the WHO Country Office in Bhutan, the team for ports, airports and ground crossings of the IHR Department from WHO headquarters as well as the International Civil Aviation Organization. The objective was to assess the core capacities at Points of Entry in line with International Health Regulation requirements and provide recommendations to develop a national IHR action plan. The key findings will form the basis for developing capacity-building action plans at these two selected points of entry. The methodology adopted in the assessment process was the WHO assessment tool for core capacity requirements at designated airports, ports and ground crossings, available at www.who.int/ihr/ports_airports/PoE_Core_capacity_assessment_tool.pdf combined with a spread sheet: www.who.int/ihr/ports_airports/PoE/en/index.html
In addition, for the airport, the ICAO CAPSCA (Cooperative Arrangement for the Prevention of Spread of Communicable disease through Air travel) checklist was used.

WPRO: Response to Japan emergency
Following the 9.0-magnitude earthquake that occurred on 11 March in Japan, the subsequent tsunamis and nuclear accidents, WPRO and its global network of experts have been working with the Japanese authorities, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and WHO HQ to diligently monitor developments and gather updated information and best risk assessment results. Regular situation updates provide the latest results on the nuclear facilities, food safety, drinking water and environmental monitoring. Situation updates and the latest news are available at: www.wpro.who.int/sites/eha/disasters/2011/jpn_earthquake/list.htm

OTHER NEWS

Reader survey
We would like to thank those of you who replied to the reader survey. We value your comments, and these will be taken into account in the development of the revised bulletin. For those who did not yet have a chance to respond but would like to take part, we invite you to complete the attached questionnaire and return it to ihrinfo@who.int by 10 May 2011.

This newsletter seeks to provide useful information for NFPs, countries and partners in implementing the IHR. We welcome your suggestions and comments and invite you to send these to Ms Sophia Desillas at: ihrinfo@who.int

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