



UNICEF'S HEALTH EMERGENCIES PREPAREDNESS INITIATIVE

A social mobilizer carries a basin of water past the soapy hands of children in Conakry, Guinea. The mobilizer is teaching the children about proper handwashing techniques, which help prevent the spread of diseases. © UNICEF/UNI170844/La Rose

INTRODUCTION

The year 2015 was marked by many humanitarian crises—including the unprecedented spread of Ebola in West Africa—and 2016 presented new and continuing challenges in global public health. The recent outbreaks of Zika, cholera, yellow fever and others are reminders of the importance of surveillance, preparedness, and a well-coordinated response.

We know how serious the impacts of such outbreaks can be on communities. Even when a disease does not disproportionately affect children's health, when it strikes their parents, caregivers and communities, it can take a dramatic toll on the ability of the community to provide the care and

services that are vital to the health and well-being of children.

UNICEF has worked to respond to many types of health emergencies over the past decades, and understands the complexities of this type of response. The organization's unique attributes—including cross-sectoral expertise, supply capacity, experience with the Interagency Standing Committee (IASC) system, strong on-the-ground capacity at country level and a community-focused approach — enable it to serve as an effective partner for national governments in developing and implementing multi-sectoral emergency responses.

A number of global post-Ebola assessments have highlighted the need for collective preparations to be made to ensure that the world is ready and able to respond to future health emergencies.

Much of this attention has focused on the International Health Regulations and the World Health Organization (WHO), which has established a new internal structure for outbreaks and emergencies. Additionally in December 2016, the IASC endorsed procedures for Level 3 activation of the humanitarian system for infectious disease events. UNICEF has also identified areas for improvement and in September 2015 launched the *Health Emergencies Preparedness Initiative (HEPI)*. This internal initiative, which seeks to strengthen the organization's capacity for responding to health emergencies is being done in coordination with partners, including WHO, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and others, and will seek to build complementarity and strengthen alignment.

WHAT IS THE UNICEF HEALTH EMERGENCIES PREPAREDNESS INITIATIVE?

The Initiative is guided by seven operating principles and focuses on four key areas of work:

For each of these areas of work, a series of preparedness and organizational activities is being carried out across the organization, enabling UNICEF to respond better to future public health emergencies, in support of governments and in coordination with partners.

The Initiative is working across all sectors—health; WASH; communication and community engagement; protection; education; nutrition; supplies and logistics and emergency operations. A cross-sectoral, inter-divisional team has been mobilized to move these activities

forward. The activities will be completed in a phased approach, with the Disease Packages of Support developed first, and followed by training and capacity building. Preparedness activities will be incorporated into existing working modalities.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

- 1 Multi-sectoral
- 2 Community-focused
- 3 Equity lens
- 4 IASC & IHR based
- 5 Supports national priorities & systems
- 6 Continuous learning, innovation & monitoring
- 7 Builds on what already exists

AREAS OF WORK

- 1 Internal organization and prioritization
- 2 Disease-specific preparation
- 3 Institutional Strengthening
- 4 Cooperation with partners

WHICH DISEASES HAVE BEEN SELECTED?

UNICEF selected a set of diseases based on which to develop ‘packages of support’ necessary for a rapid cross-sectoral response.

As a starting point, the list of diseases outlined by the WHO Pandemic and Epidemic Department and those reported in the WHO Disease Outbreak News during the past five years were considered. The diseases were organized according to mode of transmission, and various factors were analyzed, including impact on children and pregnant women, severity of morbidity and mortality, epidemic and pandemic potential, and wider socio-economic impact. Risk factors were also considered, including weak health system and response capacity, low population immunity and vaccination coverage, poor environmental sanitation and hygiene, infection prevention and control practices, and as the impact of climate change, urbanization, population displacement and migration, as well as global travel on epidemic risk and rapidity of spread.

The list of diseases and their categories are dynamic. It will be reviewed at least annually and updated as necessary. The list is not meant to serve as a ‘prioritization’ tool for national or global disease control programs. UNICEF support to national preparedness and response efforts will be based on national risk assessments and local epidemiology.

DISEASE CATEGORIES

Category 1

Current epidemics of concern and diseases of epidemic/pandemic potential with significant public health impact. This list also includes diseases that are priority for UNICEF and have pre-existing global programs.

- Arboviruses: Chikungunya, Dengue, *Yellow fever, Zika*
- Avian Influenza, Pandemic Influenza
- Ebola, Marburg
- Cholera*
- Malaria*
- Measles*
- Meningococcal disease*
- Polio (non-vaccine derived)*

Category 2

Endemic or epidemic diseases of potential threat/ changing pattern and/or currently affecting a more limited geographic area.

- Hepatitis E
- Leptospirosis
- Novel Coronaviruses (MERS-CoV and SARS-CoV)
- Typhoid fever
- Viral Hemorrhagic Fevers: Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic Fever, Lassa, Rift Valley Fever
- West Nile Virus
- Nipah and related henipaviruses

Category 3

Endemic or epidemic diseases currently affecting a limited geographic area and/or posing lower threat.

- Diphtheria
- Monkeypox
- Japanese encephalitis
- Pertussis
- Plague
- Rubella
- Seasonal Influenza
- Shigellosis, Enterohemorrhagic *E. coli*

For each priority disease, UNICEF is developing a ‘package of support’, which will consist of guidance, resources and tools necessary for a well-coordinated and rapid sector specific response in the event of an outbreak. This will also include disease-specific supply requirements with pre-positioned stock and a roster of staff for response teams. UNICEF is also working with WHO and other partners to drive research and development (R&D), including availability of vaccines, diagnostics and therapies.

NOTE: *Italicized* diseases are those with pre-existing UNICEF global programs.