WHO Emergency Committees

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Plan

• What are WHO Emergency Committees (EC)?
• Relation to *Public Health Emergency of International Concern* (PHEIC)
• Process of establishing an EC
• Selection of EC Members
• Current EC recommendations for transport/travellers (Polio, MERS CoV)
• EC and ebola
What are “Emergency Committies”?

• Established by WHO Director General, Dr Margaret Chan under the IHR (2005)
  – Main role: Determine whether a particular public health event constitutes a:
    “public health emergency of international concern” (PHEIC)
What is a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)?

A PHEIC is an **extraordinary event** which is determined, as provided in these Regulations:

(i) to constitute a public health risk to **other States** through the **international spread** of disease

and

(ii) to potentially require a **coordinated international response**

IHR (2005) Definitions
Who decides if a PHEIC exists?

• The WHO Director General, using:
  – information from the State Party where the event is occurring
  – IHR Annex 2 ("Decision Instrument")
  – Advice of the Emergency Committee
  – Scientific principles
  – Risk assessment
    • (health/spread/interference)

IHR (2005), Article 12
If the WHO and the State Party/ies agree that a PHEIC exists....

• The DG asks the Emergency Committee for advice on any temporary recommendations
If the WHO and the State Party/ies do not agree that a PHEIC exists....

– The DG will ask the Emergency Committee to provide its views on whether a PHEIC exists
– The DG will take into account the views of the EC, but.....
– The DG decides!
Who is on the Emergency Committee?

• Members selected from an “IHR Expert Roster” previously established by the DG.
• On basis of expertise and experience appropriate to particular event
• Equitable geographic representation
• Affected State Parties
WHO DG places much reliance on EC Recommendations

• Enables the DG to receive advice from a variety of experts – including from the transport sector.
• Shares the burden of decision making
• Emergency Committees established so far
  – H1N1 – pandemic influenza (PHEIC)
  – Poliovirus (PHEIC)
  – MERS CoV (no PHEIC)

No Emergency Committee established (yet) for ebola
Current recommendations on transport

- **MERS CoV (no PHEIC - 6th meeting 17 June 2014):**

  “no solid information to support the use of thermal screening as a means to stop or slow the entry of MERS-CoV infections, and that resources for supporting such screening could be better used to strengthen surveillance, infection control and prevention or other effective public health measures”
Current recommendations on transport

- **Poliovirus (PHEIC - First meeting, 28 April 2014):**
  - Pakistan, Cameroon, Syrian Arab Republic (States currently exporting wild poliovirus)
- Departing travellers receive polio vaccine 4 weeks and 12 months prior to international travel;
- If 4 week requirement not met (urgent travel) receive polio vaccine by the time of departure;
- International Certificate of Vaccination or Prophylaxis to record polio vaccination and serve as proof of vaccination.
Current recommendations on transport (2)

For States infected but not currently exporting Afghanistan, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Iraq, Israel, Somalia and particularly Nigeria)

“Encourage” similar measures
WHO does not recommend any travel or trade restrictions be applied to Guinea, Liberia, or Sierra Leone based on the current information available for this event (3 July 2014).
Summary

- WHO Emergency Committees established by WHO DG when a PHEIC does or may exist
- Provide advice to DG
- DG retains authority to indicate a PHEIC exists
- EC provides expert input: representation from:
  - Affected States
  - Different geographic regions
  - Different sectors
WHO Emergency Committee

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