



PANDEMIC PREVENTION

and management in urban settings

ISSUES: A pandemic is an epidemic of infectious disease that spreads through human populations across a large region. Throughout history there have been a number of pandemics, such as plague, Spanish influenza and, more recently, pandemic (H1N1) 2009. Rapid urbanization is exacerbating the vulnerability of urban dwellers, particularly the urban poor, to the impacts of pandemics. As many infectious disease viruses are spread through interpersonal contact, people living in urban settings in developing countries, particularly in overcrowded slum areas, are likely to be among groups that are most affected by a pandemic. Compromised health systems in many countries of the WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region present a further challenge to pandemic response.

THE SOLUTION: Infection prevention and control starts at the most basic level, good behavioural practices and hygiene etiquette. Local authorities in collaboration with the other stakeholders, especially in urban settings, should focus on pandemic preparedness planning in a coordinated manner and on building flexible, sustainable health education and communication networks involving the communities. In the event of a pandemic, the public health response must be implemented through well-coordinated health communications. The active involvement and participation of community leaders in communication efforts is strongly advised.

ACTIONS DURING 2010:

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean is focusing efforts on supporting countries to plan and implement their national response to pandemic (H1N1) 2009. Ongoing

activities include the following.

- Development of interim guidance for health professionals as well as key messages for the communities in order to avoid confusion and to minimize risks associated with the pandemic;
- Dissemination of accurate, science-based information about the pandemic in a timely and effective manner;
- Informing the community members, especially community leaders about measures to protect themselves and their family members and colleagues;
- Building public trust and confidence to support the implementation of pandemic control and mitigation measures;
- Involving health care workers and public health staff in media relations and public health communications;
- Addressing misconceptions and rumours and minimizing speculation and overly confident assessments of investigations and control measures.

THE WAY FORWARD: World Health Day 2010 provides an opportunity not only to promote ongoing pandemic (H1N1) 2009 prevention and control measures but also to raise awareness on the importance of pandemic preparedness in urban settings. Preventive approaches should address, at minimum, good behavioural and hygiene practices. Effective and appropriate social mobilization should be designed as part of preparedness in a way that engages active participation from all spheres in the community. Good communication will be the key to maintaining trust and good relationships with communities. In addition, public facilities should be put into place that are conducive to healthy behaviour and hygiene.



World Health Day 2010
Urbanization and Health



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