



BULLETIN

Pre Regional Committee technical meetings, 19th October 2014

The pre-RC technical meetings start today in Tunis

The pre-Regional Committee technical meetings will take place in the Le Serail Conference Hall, Le Palace Hotel, Gammarth, Tunis on 19 October 2014 at 9:00.

Participants will discuss a range of important health issues including public health response to climate change and air pollution in the Region, social determinants of health, preparedness for disease outbreaks with special emphasis on MERS-CoV and Ebola, as well as prevention and control of viral hepatitis and saving lives of mothers and children.

A special focus is given to polio eradication.



61st Session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean opens in Tunis tonight

The inaugural session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean is scheduled to take place in the Le Serail Conference Hall, Le Palace Hotel, Gammarth, Tunis, Tunisia, tonight at 19:00.

Functioning as WHO's governing body at the regional level, the Regional Committee consists of representatives of all Member States of the Eastern Mediterranean Region.

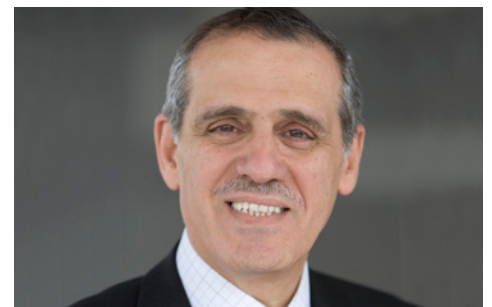
The opening session will be inaugurated by H.E. Prof. Mohamed Saleh bin Ammar, Minister of Health of Tunisia, who will deliver a welcoming speech from the government of Tunisia, Dr Ahmed Bin Mohamed Al Saeedi, Chair of the 60th session of the Regional Committee, Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean.

The meeting will address a range of important health issues representing priorities for the 22 countries of the Region. Participating in the discussions are ministers of health, representatives of national, regional and international organizations and agencies concerned with health, as well as experts from WHO headquarters and the Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

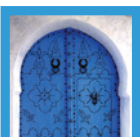
During the opening session of the RC, a video film on activities implemented by WHO and Member States since last RC to-date, will be broadcast. The video focuses on strategic actions related to health priorities.



*H.E. / Mehdi Jomaa
Tunisian Prime Minister*



*Dr. Ala Alwan - WHO Regional Director
for the Eastern Mediterranean*



Accelerating MDGs 4&5

During the pre-Regional Committee meetings, participants will discuss the issue of saving the lives of mothers and children and review progress on accelerating MDGs 4&5.

The maternal mortality ratio decreased by 50% between 1990 and 2013, and under-five mortality rate decreased by 45% between 1990 and 2012 in the Eastern Mediterranean Region. Despite these achievements, the levels of reduction fall short of MDG 4 (a 66% reduction in under-five mortality by 2015) and of MDG 5 (a 75% reduction in maternal mortality ratio by 2015). If the current trend continues, MDG 4 and MDG 5 will not be achieved in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.



Polio eradication: an increasing challenge

The Eastern Mediterranean Region is currently the most polio-affected Region in the world, hosting two of the three remaining endemic countries. Two outbreaks in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East pose serious threats to regional and global eradication efforts. Eradication of wild poliovirus continues to be hampered by difficulties in ensuring safe access to children in conflict areas, an inconsistent rate of improvement in the quality and coverage of supplementary immunization activities, and weak routine immunization programmes.

The 61st session of the Regional Committee will address the key challenge of polio eradication.



Climate change and its health impacts

It is now generally acknowledged that the global climate is changing as the earth becomes warmer. This change has the potential to affect human health in a number of ways, for instance by altering the geographic range and seasonality of certain infectious diseases, disturbing food-producing ecosystems, and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events such as hurricanes.

Climate change and air pollution are linked to the risk factors for noncommunicable diseases. Extreme weather events can also have an impact on water supply and sanitation, with grave consequences for public health.

Participants in the pre-RC technical meetings will discuss action that is needed to address climate change and its health impacts.



WHO/UNFPA/UNICEF Partnership for Health

To scale up efforts to improve maternal and child health in the Region, an initiative on Saving the Lives of Mothers and Children was launched by WHO, UNFPA and UNICEF together with Member States in a high-level meeting held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in January 2013.

WHO has been supporting implementation of the regional initiative since its launch and is providing intensive day-to-day technical support to the nine high-burden countries in close partnership with UNFPA and UNICEF, in order to implement maternal and child health acceleration plans aimed at bridging the gaps in achieving MDGs 4 and 5 in these countries.

To date, six countries (Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Somalia and Sudan) officially launched the plans.



Infection is a major killer of mothers and children

Infection is a major killer of mothers, newborns and children under five years of age. In order to build national capacity in infection control, the Regional Office has developed and field-tested an infection control assessment tool for use in countries with a high burden of maternal and child mortality. Training on the use of the tool is being conducted in high-burden countries. A similar tool is being developed to enable Member States to assess the quality of maternal and child health services in health centers and hospitals.



EMRC: New WHO EMRO mobile application

In line with continuing evolution of digital era, EMRO launches a new mobile application for all RC participants. This application provides an efficient way to access to all materials and updates of the current session of the Regional Committee through smart phones and tablet devices.

Facts about the Regional Committee

- The Regional Committee is WHO's governing body at the regional level. It is responsible for health policy- and decision-making.
- The membership of the Regional Committee comprises a representative from each WHO Member State in the Region, often the minister of health.
- The representatives may be accompanied by alternates and advisers.
- The WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean is the Secretary of the Regional Committee.
- The Regional Committee is convened every year, usually in October.
- This year's meeting is hosted by the Government of Tunisia and will take place from 19 to 23 October 2014.
- The first session of the Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean was held in 1949 in the WHO Regional Offices premises in Alexandria.
- There is no permanent venue for the meeting. Some years, the Regional Committee is hosted outside the Regional Office in Egypt and is hosted by Member States. The Committee determines the upcoming date and location of the end of the meeting.

Preparedness for MERS-CoV and Ebola

Today's pre-RC technical meetings cover the issue of preparedness for disease outbreaks, with special emphasis on the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) and Ebola. Currently, these are the two biggest public health emergencies – MERS-CoV in the Eastern Mediterranean Region and Ebola in the African Region – and pose the

biggest threats to global health security. MERS-CoV has killed over 300 people since its emergence in 2012 and affected half of the countries (11 out of 22) in the Region. The current outbreak of Ebola is by far the largest and the first multi-country outbreak of the disease ever reported.



Social Determinants of Health: moving to action

The Social Determinants of Health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age, including the health system. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels, which are themselves influenced by policy choices. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries.

Tackling Social Determinants of Health is recognized as being a fundamental approach to the work of WHO and a priority area in the draft 12th WHO general programme of work 2014-2019.

This issue will be discussed during the pre-RC meetings to explore means to move to concrete action in the Eastern Mediterranean Region.



Viral hepatitis burden in the Region

Hepatitis is the common name for all inflammatory diseases of the liver. Hepatitis viruses A, B, C, D and E can cause acute and chronic infection and inflammation of the liver that can lead to cirrhosis and liver cancer. These viruses constitute a major global health risk with around 240 million people being chronically infected with hepatitis B and around 150 million people chronically infected with hepatitis C. These viruses differ in the ways they are transmitted and the forms of disease they cause.

Viral hepatitis infections can go unnoticed in people when they do not result in symptoms. In some patients, they can cause mild to severe illness.

Scaling up national efforts to prevent and control hepatitis is one of the agenda items of the pre-RC technical meetings today

