Best Practices for Preparedness and Response to a Biological Event

Background

The 2012 ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Workshop on Preparedness and Response to a Biological Event, held 5-7 September 2012 in Manila, Philippines, shared technical information and experiences on approaches to preparedness and response as applied by ARF member states. The workshop discussed the principles needed for enhancing dynamic public health strategies to strengthen national systems and infrastructure as they relate to the preparedness and response to a biological event. The workshop recognized that national strategies for enhancing biosecurity and biosafety issues vary country to country and that local solutions need to be found to local problems. It encouraged member states to adapt their own guidelines to suit their own individual circumstances. To this end, participants drafted the following list of best practices as guidance for implementation of a preparedness and response system. This list of best practices can be a useful tool for national governments, assistance providers, and the ARF in their respective implementation of national and regional preparedness and response cooperation. This list is not exhaustive and not all of these practices are applicable to all countries; rather this list is intended to provide useful reference points for countries in developing their own national systems.

"Best Practices"

- Preparedness:
    - Strengthen laboratory biosafety and biosecurity to mitigate risks of accidental release or international misuse of pathogens and protect researchers from laboratory acquired infections during a biological event
    - Focus on <u>early</u> detection to permit a prompt response that will mitigate consequences
    - Raise awareness of first responders, health care workers, and public health officials at the local as well as national level
    - Ensure first responders and medical community are properly equipped in advance so they are able to respond rapidly as needed
    - Develop strong communication and data exchange networks across sectors to bolster detection, reporting, and response
    - Integrate local and national health agencies, emergency response groups, law enforcement agencies, military units, the private sector, and international organizations and laboratories
    - Stockpile vaccines and drugs to effectively respond to a variety of biological agents
- Response:
    - Strengthen epidemiological capacity to ensure quick detection, diagnostics, and characterization
    - Develop reporting structures to ensure rapid and accurate reporting of data from local to national and international level

- Communication System:
    - Draft education material to raise public awareness before an incident occurs
    - Prepare public outreach strategies to effectively communicate accurate, timely, and consistent information to the general population as a public health emergency unfolds.
    - Identify a single spokesperson to interact with the public and the press to create a unified, national voice and prevent misinformation, which could cause health systems to become overwhelmed by the "worried well"
- Continue to advance full implementation of the WHO International Health Regulations (2005), especially as these regulations apply to strengthening global alert and response systems