

1. Introduction



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These guidelines were prepared in response to the need observed in various countries of the Americas where the increase in intentional and unintentional injuries has become a pressing social and public health problem. National and local governments, ministries of health, institutes of forensic medicine, the police, the judicial sector, nongovernmental organizations, universities, communities, in short, all those who want to take action to prevent injuries, recognize the urgent need for information that is reliable and timely, and that presents an accurate picture of the problem of violence that concerns them.

The creation of information systems with clearly established criteria, known in the public health sector as epidemiological surveillance systems (ESS), is

a coherent proposal for remedying information gaps. **Not only will preventive interventions be grounded in an analysis founded on reality, but better tools will be available to evaluate the development of projects and programs.**

Epidemiological surveillance systems are intended to answer questions such as who is affected by violent acts and injuries; in what circumstances, under what conditions, and at what times these events occur; and what factors are associated with their occurrence. In short, their purpose is to provide useful information for those working to control, respond to, and prevent acts of violence.

In its Regional Action Plan on “Health and Violence,” the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) identified the “design of information systems on violence with procedures for classification, registry, and systematization” as one of the aspects in need of development¹. The Program on Non-Communicable Diseases (HCN), of the Division of Disease Prevention and Control, has defined as priority strategies the design and implementation of epidemiological surveillance systems and the definition and development of preventive intervention projects. PAHO is interested in applying the approach and methods of public health work, in coordination with other sectors, to help reduce and prevent violence and injuries.

These guidelines are intended to help bring about changes at the national or local level that will permit the effective implementation of epidemiological surveillance systems.