Towards a more resilient health sector in the Americas
A Region at Risk

The Latin American and Caribbean Region is exposed to a wide variety of emergencies and disasters of increasing scale and frequency, which affect the Region each year. These events have a significant impact on the health of populations and constitute a major challenge for Latin American and Caribbean countries in protecting their people’s well-being.

In the period between 2007-2016, around 24% of the disasters caused by natural phenomena that occurred worldwide took place in the region of the Americas, killing over 247 thousand, affecting more than 203 million people and causing a total damage of 466 billion US dollars. Each year, these numbers grow, posing serious threats to public health and countries’ development.

Emerging health emergencies, such as the Zika virus epidemic which exposed more than 500 million people in the LAC Region, represent new threats to public health and demand a broader scope for preparedness and response.
PAHO’s Work in Health Emergencies

The objective of the Pan American Health Organization’s work in health emergencies is to increase the health sector’s resilience to emergencies and disasters.

PAHO assists its Member States to strengthen their health sector’s capacities in the area of prevention, risk reduction, preparedness, surveillance, response to and early recovery from emergencies and disasters related to any hazards (natural, man-made, biological, chemical, radiological, and others). When national capacities are overwhelmed, PAHO supports countries to lead and coordinate the international health response to contain disasters, including outbreaks, and to provide effective relief and recovery to affected populations.
PAHO/WHO’s work in health emergencies is articulated according to six main areas of work:

- Infectious Hazard Management (IHM);
- Country health emergency preparedness and the International Health Regulations (CPI);
- Health Emergency Information and Risk Assessment (HIM);
- Emergency Operations (EMO);
- Disaster Risk Reduction and Special Projects (DRR);
- Emergency Core Services (HEO).
Infectious Hazard Management

This area of work supports countries in the surveillance, prevention, preparedness and control of pandemic & epidemic-prone diseases, through the development of evidence-based strategies to predict, prevent, detect and respond to infectious hazards. It also ensures the regional surveillance functions related to these hazards.
Major Action Lines:

- Pandemic & epidemic-prone diseases: Influenza, MERS, hemorrhagic fevers and hantavirus, yellow fever & emerging arboviruses, plague, cholera & epidemic-prone diarrheal diseases, leptospirosis, meningococcal disease.
- Expert networks and interventions for surveillance and response: epidemiology and modeling, laboratory, clinical management and infection prevention & control.
Country
Health Emergency Preparedness and IHR
This area of work aims to ensure that all countries of the Region have capabilities for all hazards health emergency and disaster risk management, including the core capacities needed to fulfill their responsibilities under the IHR 2005. The goal is to ensure that each Member State builds its own standing capacity to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from humanitarian emergencies and large outbreaks.

**Major Action Lines:**

- Institutionalization of a national health emergency management;
- Development and implementation of health multi-hazard preparedness and response plan;
- Identification and training of multidisciplinary health response teams;
- Regional IHR secretariat activities;
- IHR Core Capacity Building, Assessment, Monitoring and Evaluation;
- Development of guidelines, learning materials and standard operating procedures;
- Implementation of the Emergency Medical Teams initiative.
This area of work provides timely and authoritative situation analysis, risk assessment, and response monitoring for all acute public health events and emergencies.

As the Regional contact point for the IHR, PAHO’s Health Emergencies department continuously coordinates the strengthening of the systematic detection, verification, and risk assessment of events, including training, coordination, and dissemination of accurate and timely information for all potential public health events of international concern and acute public health events.
Major Action Lines:

- 24/7 Detection, Verification and Risk Assessment of Public Health Events under the IHR;
- Collection, management, analysis and reporting on data related to public health events, emergencies, and disasters;
- Definition of minimal standardized information required for different emergency related activities/topics;
- Development of basic operational tools and risk mapping;
- Development of prediction tools and modeling;
- Production of country risk profiles and their periodic updating.
Emergency Operations

This area of work provides support to countries to ensure that emergency-affected populations have access to an essential package of life-saving health services. It also focuses on building institutional capacity and continuously enhancing the Organization’s systems and processes to ensure a more predictable and effective response to health emergencies.
Major Actions Lines:

- Implementation of response operations, including the coordination of the regional GOARN network, and other health partners (EMT, NGOs, Red Cross Societies, etc.);
- Development of strategic response and joint operations plans to guide response operations;
- Maintenance of full operational capacity of PAHO’s Emergency Operations Center;
- Activation and implementation of emergency response mechanisms in accordance with PAHO’s Policy and Procedures of the Institutional Response to Emergencies and Disasters, including full support to the Incident Management System.
Emergency Core Services

This area of work is responsible for implementing capacities, policies, procedures and systems which are standardized across the Organization, and fit for purpose to support effective management and sustainable staffing and financing of the emergencies program, while ensuring inter-operability and consistency during coordinated emergency response efforts through partnership.
Major Actions Lines:

- Development and continuous update of Standard Operating Procedures, Policies, Guidelines and standardized templates;
- Planning, Organization, Direction and Control;
- Recruitment and retention of personnel;
- Resource mobilization and advocacy;
- Crisis and Risk Communication.
This area of work supports countries in the implementation of the Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction 2016 – 2021, which aims to protect the lives of patients and health workers, shield health equipment and supplies from disasters, and ensure that the health services continue operating effectively during and after emergencies and disasters in order to save lives, reduce disabilities, and enable the health sector to fulfill its continuing responsibilities.
Major Actions Lines:

- Implementation of the Plan of Action on Disaster Risk Reduction 2016-2021;
- Implementation of the Regional Safe Hospitals initiative;
- Promotion and implementation of climate-smart mitigation and adaptation measures for health facilities;
- Development and implementation of emergency risk reduction and management strategies for internally displaced populations (IDP), individuals with disabilities and countries in condition of high vulnerability.
PAHO/WHO generates and disseminates knowledge about all aspects of public health emergency preparedness, risk reduction and response. Available publications include technical guidelines on public health and disasters; up-to-date information for decision making through the Emergency Operation Center; epidemiological alerts; lessons learned and evidence-based information; information tools, services and centers, such as the Regional Disaster Information Center, the Health and Disasters portal, the Health Operations in Emergencies portal, and others.

To learn more about PAHO’s work in health emergencies visit our webpage [www.paho.org/emergencies](http://www.paho.org/emergencies)
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