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**Technical briefing, Wednesday, 14 September 2016
13:00–14:30, Plenary**

Health laboratory strengthening: an essential component of early warning surveillance and response systems and a national core capacity of the International Health Regulations (2005)¹

Background

The International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR (2005)) were adopted by the Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly in resolution WHA58.3 in May 2005 and entered into force in June 2007. The purpose and scope of the IHR (2005) are “to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade.” The IHR (2005) requires WHO Member States to develop national capacity for the detection and investigation of potential public health emergencies of international concern and for reporting to the international community through WHO.

Reliable and accessible laboratory services capable of producing results in a timely manner are an essential component of a country’s surveillance capacity in order to trigger prompt public health interventions. In a number of countries, laboratory performance is hindered by specific challenges, such as issues relating to staffing, supplies, quality management, biorisk management, sample transport, coordination and funding.

The Regional Office for Europe provides support to laboratory networks responsible for targeted disease programmes and emergency response systems, through its networks and WHO Collaborating Centres. The Better Labs for Better Health initiative is a sector-wide, health-systems approach to strengthening national laboratory services.

¹ International Health Regulations (2005). Second edition. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2005 (<http://www.who.int/ihr/publications/9789241596664/en/>).

Objectives

The objectives of this technical briefing are:

- to elaborate on the role of laboratory services in the IHR (2005) and provide an overview of WHO's work on strengthening national laboratory capacity in the European Region;
- to share national experiences and models of good practice in laboratory strengthening; and
- to discuss the need to engage political support towards a framework for laboratory capacity development at national and regional levels as a prerequisite for IHR (2005) implementation and national emergency preparedness.

Provisional programme

Time	Topic/speaker
25 min	Welcome and briefing by the WHO Regional Office for Europe <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas Hofmann Technical Officer, Preparedness & Response to Emergencies with Health Consequences, Division of Communicable Diseases and Health Security • Caroline Brown Programme Manager, Influenza and other Respiratory Pathogens, Division of Communicable Diseases and Health Security
30 min	Presentations by Member States –To be confirmed –
25 min	Panel discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What issues/gaps exist with regard to laboratory capacity? • What support do Member States require from WHO to close the gaps in laboratory capacity? • What key elements should be included in a framework for laboratory capacity development for the WHO European Region?
10 min	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summary and next steps by the Chair