

**WHO REGIONAL OFFICE FOR EUROPE
HEALTH EMERGENCIES PROGRAMME**

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**EUROPEAN REGIONAL LABORATORY TASK
FORCE FOR HIGH THREAT PATHOGENS
(LAB TASK FORCE)**

Terms of Reference



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Publications
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DK - 2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark

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Abbreviations

ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
EDPLN	WHO Emerging and Dangerous Pathogens Laboratory Network
EMERGE	Efficient response to highly dangerous and emerging pathogens at EU level
EU	European Union
EULabCap	EU Laboratory Capability Monitoring System
EVD-LabNet	European expert laboratory network for emerging viral diseases
GLAD HP	Global Laboratories Alliance for the Diagnosis of High Threat Pathogens
GOARN	Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network
GPW13	WHO 13th General Programme of Work
HTP	High threat pathogen
MediLabSecure	One Health Network for the Prevention of Vector-borne Diseases Around the Mediterranean and Black Sea Regions
NLWG	National laboratory working group
NMFP	National microbiology focal point
SECID	Southeast European Center for Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases
WHE	WHO Health Emergencies Programme

Background

To support implementation of the action plan to improve public health preparedness and response in the WHO European Region, as per Resolution EUR/RC68/R7 of the 68th session of the Regional Committee for Europe (RC68) in September 2018¹, and as part of the work of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE) addressing Area 3 of the Better Labs for Better Health initiative², the WHO Regional Office for Europe is establishing the European Regional Laboratory Task Force for High Threat Pathogens (Lab Task Force).

The aim of the Lab Task Force is to strengthen preparedness for outbreaks by helping particularly WHE priority countries³ in the WHO European Region improve their capacities for the detection of outbreaks caused by high threat pathogens (HTPs). HTPs of interest are pathogens notifiable under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR), such as new subtypes of influenza and SARS, as well as pathogens of regional or national interest such as Crimean-Congo haemorrhagic fever virus (CCHF), anthrax and other pathogens that pose a high public health risk because of their epidemic potential and because there are no, or insufficient, interventions. Under IHR, all states' parties must have in place the capacities to detect pathogens that may pose an acute public health threat.

Countries with strengthened capacities for the laboratory detection of HTPs will be better able to participate in international networks for laboratory surveillance, preparedness and response. Such networks represent an important platform for sharing information and expertise, and as a system for referral of diagnostic specimens for primary and confirmatory testing, including pathogen strain determination. The establishment of international collaborative networks of public health laboratories is therefore an essential step towards achieving IHR compliance.

A number of international laboratory networks and platforms already exist. The WHO Regional Office for Europe currently coordinates and supports regional networks for influenza, poliomyelitis, measles and rubella, and tuberculosis⁴; these networks are part of global WHO networks. WHO headquarters also coordinate networks for laboratory preparedness and response, namely the Emerging and Dangerous Pathogens Laboratory Network (EDPLN)⁵ and the Global Laboratories Alliance for the Diagnosis of High Threat Pathogens (GLAD HP). WHO coordinates the deployment of mobile laboratories and laboratory experts to the field during emergencies through the Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network (GOARN)⁶. All of the above networks include WHO collaborating centres.

¹ Action plan to improve public health preparedness and response in the WHO European Region http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/378168/68wd14e_ActionPlanPreparedness_180516.pdf?ua=1

² Better Labs for Better Health: Strengthening Laboratory Systems in the WHO European Region http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/382969/blbh-rep-2016-2017-eng.pdf

³ Based on countries' hazards mapping, vulnerability and health system maturity the following priority countries were selected: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Republic of Moldova, Serbia, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkey, Ukraine and Uzbekistan http://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/378168/68wd14e_ActionPlanPreparedness_180516.pdf?ua=1

⁴ Regional laboratory networks: <http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Health-systems/laboratory-services/disease-specific-laboratory-services>.

⁵ EDPLN: <https://www.who.int/csr/bioriskreduction/laboratorynetwork/en/>.

⁶ GOARN: https://www.who.int/ihr/alert_and_response/outbreak-network/en/.

European Regional Laboratory Task Force for High Threat Pathogens

(Lab Task Force)

In addition, at the European Union (EU) level, the EU and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) coordinate and support the European expert laboratory network for emerging viral diseases (EVD-LabNet)⁷, the European network of diagnostic laboratories for efficient response to highly dangerous and emerging pathogens (EMERGE)⁸, and the One Health Network for the Prevention of Vector-borne Diseases Around the Mediterranean and Black Sea Regions (MediLabSecure)⁹. In addition, ECDC coordinates a network of National Microbiology Focal Points (NMFPs) that consists of members nominated by the EU and EEA member states' competent bodies and also includes Observer NMFPs from EU candidate countries. The NMFPs support and advise ECDC by sharing knowledge on the structures of their national public health microbiology systems; and by monitoring the preparedness and response capacities and capabilities for infectious threat detection, assessment and surveillance via the EU Laboratory Capability Monitoring System (EULabCap)¹⁰.

However, not all countries in the WHO European Region participate in such networks or initiatives, leaving gaps in the Region's surveillance and preparedness capacity covering HTPs. This is particularly so for the WHE priority countries.

The Lab Task Force will therefore serve as a network for knowledge transfer and exchange between WHE priority countries and international laboratory networks for the management of HTPs to ensure that States' parties build, strengthen and maintain the core capacities required under the IHR (2005) outlined in Strategic pillar 1 of the Action Plan to Improve Public Health Preparedness and Response in the WHO European Region.

The Lab Task Force will consist of laboratory focal points formally nominated by the countries or areas for a period of two years. Experts from partner organizations, international laboratory networks, WHO collaborating centres, professional associations for laboratory staff and other relevant experts will be invited on a needs basis. [Annex 1](#) lists the organizations that participated in the workshop for establishment of the Lab Task Force in Istanbul, Turkey in January 2019.

The WHO Regional Office for Europe will function as the Secretariat for the Lab Task Force. An important task of the Secretariat will be to ensure that activities are coordinated with existing initiatives and partners, both at the EU-level and globally. The Lab Task Force will operate for at least five years, in alignment with the action plan to improve public health preparedness and response in the WHO European Region, 2019–2023, and WHO's 13th General Programme of Work (GPW13)¹¹. In addition, there will be an annual open call for interested organizations to participate in specific activities.

Meetings of the Lab Task Force will be held at least annually and will be organized by the Secretariat, either face-to-face or through tele- or videoconferencing, depending on the availability of funds.

⁷ EVD-LabNet: <https://www.evd-labnet.eu/>.

⁸ EMERGE: <https://www.emerge.rki.eu/>.

⁹ MediLabSecure: <http://www.medilabsecure.com/>.

¹⁰ ECDC Microbiology: <https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/microbiology/laboratory-capacity-and-capability>

¹¹ WHO's 13th General Program of Work 13: http://apps.who.int/gb/ebwha/pdf_files/WHA71/A71_4-en.pdf?ua=1

Terms of reference of the European Regional Laboratory Task Force for High Threat Pathogens

- Facilitate national and international coordination and knowledge transfer related to laboratory preparedness and capacity building for HTPs, including the exchange of information, data and specimens between national and international reference laboratories.
- Support interaction of the countries with existing regional (EU) and global networks.
- Identify and address areas for improvement in diagnostic capacity for the Region, including assessment of national capacity, training needs, external quality assurance (EQA), the introduction of new or improved diagnostics, biosafety, and sample referral and shipment.
- Provide technical advice on specific projects.
- Promote and support quality and safety management implementation.

Terms of reference of the Laboratory Focal Points

Each WHE priority country¹ shall nominate a laboratory focal point to represent the national microbiology programmes/laboratory networks on the Lab Task Force¹². The laboratory focal point shall be a lead expert from a national public health laboratory that has a coordinating role, or that participates in, emergency preparedness and response to HTPs. The laboratory focal point shall have one alternate. In countries where there is a national laboratory working group (NLWG) that is part of the Better Labs for Better Health initiative¹³, the laboratory focal point can be selected from this group. In countries where there is a national microbiology focal point supporting the work of ECDC¹⁴, it is proposed that collaboration and information sharing be established. In the same way with European Network for Diagnostics of "Imported" Viral Diseases¹⁵ focal points when present.

Specific activities of the laboratory focal point:

- Serve as a member of the Lab Task Force according to its terms of reference and participate in Lab Task Force meetings when invited by the Secretariat.
- Promote and contribute to national capacity building of high threat pathogen laboratory services, and the development of training schemes.
- Contribute to activities to establish or enhance national and regional laboratory networks for preparedness and response to HTPs, thus contributing to the implementation of the IHR.
- Contribute to activities to integrate epidemiological, microbiological and clinical aspects of surveillance, preparedness and response.
- Help engage other sectors dealing with health, in particular veterinary laboratories, in activities of the Lab Task Force, with a view to enhancing exchange of information and data on zoonotic disease laboratory surveillance, and in support of One Health.
- Promote and support quality and safety management implementation.

¹² Laboratory networks – disease specific networks as well as networks focusing on biosafety, quality management systems, and on the transport of dangerous goods.

¹³ Better Labs for Better Health Progress Report: http://www.euro.who.int/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/382969/blbh-rep-2016-2017-eng.pdf?ua=1

¹⁴ National microbiology focal point: <https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/public-health-microbiology-programme/national-focal-points>

¹⁵ European Network for Diagnostics of "Imported" Viral Diseases: <http://www.enivd.de/index.htm>

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- Help identify the need for new or improved high threat pathogen diagnostic technologies, and, where possible, participate in such developments as well as their application.

Lab Task Force Secretariat

The WHO Regional Office for Europe will provide the Lab Task Force with Secretariat support, which will operate within the following terms of reference:

- Coordinate activities of the Lab Task Force and technical assistance to countries.
- Facilitate and organize communication between and among members (laboratory focal points) and partners of the Lab Task Force through email, other internet-based information platforms (e.g. the Better Labs for Better Health EZcollab information sharing platform) and face-to-face meetings.
- Ensure the work of the Lab Task Force is effective by coordinating with existing networks and by complementing and learning from them.
- Develop and publish an annual report of the activities of the Lab Task Force on the WHO Regional Office for Europe website, and disseminate the report to stakeholders and members for advocacy purposes.
- Share resources such as latest information on laboratory capacity strengthening and diagnostics of HTPs with members and partners.
- Identify main challenges and provide support to countries and areas on how to face them.
- Identify and engage new partners.
- Monitor and evaluate the Lab Task Force activities.

Annex 1: Organizations participating in the Lab Task Force establishment workshop Istanbul, Turkey, 30–31 January 2019

The WHO Emerging and Dangerous Pathogens Laboratory Network (EDPLN)¹⁶.

The Global Laboratory Alliance for the Detection of High-Threat Pathogens (GLAD-HP) – part of Infectious Hazard Management programme within WHO’s Health Emergencies Programme.

European expert laboratory network for emerging viral diseases (EVD-LabNet)¹⁷.

Southeast European Center for Surveillance and Control of Infectious Diseases (SECID)¹⁸.

WHO Collaborating Centre for Emerging Infections and Biological Threats¹⁹ at the Robert Koch Institute, Berlin, Germany.

WHO Collaborating Centre for Clinical Care, Diagnosis, Response and Training on Highly Infectious Diseases²⁰ at the National Institute for Infectious Diseases “L. Spallanzani” (INMI), Rome, Italy.

WHO Collaborating Centre for Arbovirus and Haemorrhagic Fever Reference and Research²¹ at the Erasmus Medical Centre (EMC), Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

WHO Collaborating Centre for Virus Reference & Research (Special Pathogens)²² at Public Health England, Porton Down, United Kingdom.

WHO Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Brucellosis²³ at the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA), Addlestone, United Kingdom.

WHO Collaborating Centre for Rabies Surveillance and Research²⁴, at the Friedrich-Loeffler-Institut, Griefswald, Germany.

¹⁶ <https://www.who.int/csr/bioriskreduction/laboratorynetwork/en/>

¹⁷ <https://ecdc.europa.eu/en/about-us/partnerships-and-networks/disease-and-laboratory-networks/evd-labnet>

¹⁸ <http://www.secids.com/>

¹⁹ http://apps.who.int/whocc/Detail.aspx?cc_ref=DEU-135&cc_subject=infection%20control&

²⁰ http://apps.who.int/whocc/Detail.aspx?cc_ref=ITA-89&responsible_officer=barbeschi&

²¹ http://apps.who.int/whocc/Detail.aspx?cc_ref=KEN-5&cc_code=ken

²² http://apps.who.int/whocc/Detail.aspx?cc_ref=UNK-122&institution_full_name=public%20health%20england&

²³ http://apps.who.int/whocc/Detail.aspx?cc_ref=UNK-98&cc_subject=men

²⁴ http://apps.who.int/whocc/Detail.aspx?cc_ref=DEU-52&tor=rabies&

The WHO Regional Office for Europe

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World Health Organization Regional Office for Europe

UN City, Marmorvej 51, DK-2100 Copenhagen Ø, Denmark

Tel: +45 45 33 70 00 Fax: +45 45 33 70 01

Email: eucontact@who.int

Website: www.euro.who.int