Background

The International Health Regulations (2005), or IHR (2005), came into force on 15 June 2007, and call for strengthening public health security in travel and transport. The risk of international spread of disease can be minimized through effective, permanent public health measures and response capacity at points of entry (PoE) such as airports, ports and ground crossings in all countries. The revised IHR call on designated authorities in Member countries to “treat travelers with respect for their dignity, human rights and fundamental freedoms and minimize any discomfort or distress associated with such measures” while complying with IHR requirements. The expected outcomes of effective implementation include:

1. Facilities used by travelers at points of entry are maintained in a sanitary condition and are kept free of infection or contamination, including vectors and reservoirs.
2. Routine measures, in compliance with IHR (2005), are in place for travelers, conveyances, cargo, goods and postal parcels.
3. A public health contingency plan for public health emergencies is effectively available and operational at all designated PoE and in all countries.
4. Designated PoE have the capacity to rapidly implement international public health recommendations.
5. Coordination exists between WHO and other relevant UN and intergovernmental organizations, industry associations and travel-related professional associations.

Achievements

WHO/SEARO remains committed to facilitate the implementation of IHR (2005) in the Member countries and have started the process to support them for effective implementation at points of entry. An assessment of existing core capacities at designated PoE to prevent the spread of infection was completed in Member countries and the findings were shared with them. These findings have helped WHO address the gaps and take further steps to plan for effective implementation of (IHR 2005).

The Member countries have started the process to develop, strengthen and maintain core capacities on a routine and emergency basis.

WHO publishes lists of designated PoE authorized to issue ship sanitation control exemption certificates/ship sanitation control certificates. WHO also arranges for certification of airports and ports that meet IHR (2005) requirements on request from Member countries. In addition, the guidelines for transport of biological specimens are regularly being updated by WHO.

Gaps and needs

There remain essential gaps in our plans to implement effective infection control measures at PoE, which are a major constraint to implementation of IHR (2005). This area is one of those seven areas of work under the IHR (2005) that remains neglected and unstudied. There is a limited capacity in Member countries to enhance contingency and emergency planning mechanisms for all new IHR provisions at all designated PoE. There is an urgent need to collaborate with Member countries to undertake a systemic assessment at the designated PoE. The assessment would identify requirements and suggest effective measures for implementing hygiene and sanitation as well as ensuring effective vector, rodent, environmental and public health control measures and procedures at PoE in affected areas.

Member countries are being urged to integrate drills into their contingency and emergency plans in order to test operational capacity. The Member countries are also being requested to study their capacity to issue Ship Sanitation Control Exemption and Ship Sanitation Control certificates.