

WHO to accelerate national and global health security

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The [World Health Organization](#) (WHO) has brought together 200 high-level experts from governments, development agencies, civil society and international organizations to make the world a safer place.

The conference called "Building Health Security Beyond Ebola" is held in Cape Town, South Africa, from 13 to 15 July.

Experts at the meeting will focus on how to make countries and communities stronger by accelerating development of health systems and capacities identified by the International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) to prevent, detect and respond to a public health emergency of international concern.

All WHO Member States have accepted the IHR as the internationally agreed foundation to build global health security.

Dr David Nabarro, Secretary-General's Special Envoy on Ebola, who helped open the conference emphasized the importance of stopping outbreaks before they become catastrophic.

Other key messages were delivered by Ms Malebona Precious Matsoso, Director General of the National Department of Health, Republic of South Africa, Dr Keiji Fukuda, Assistant Director-General, WHO, Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa (via video), H.E. Ambassador Olawale Maiyegun, African Union, Dr Päivi Sillanaukee, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Finland, and Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, U.S. Department of State.

Public health emergencies of international concern, including the Ebola virus disease (EVD) epidemic in West Africa, have demonstrated the need for countries to be prepared and have the capacity to rapidly respond to outbreaks and emergencies to maintain national and global health security.

"Transborder, transnational and intercontinental cooperation remains a high priority for WHO considering the frequency and

magnitude of health crises before us. To prepare and respond to these crises, we have no margin for error and timing is essential," said Dr Matshidiso Moeti, WHO Regional Director for Africa.

Progress has been made in strengthening public health capacities to manage disease outbreaks; however, gaps in core capacities and funding remain major impediments and require renewed commitment from national governments with support from the international community.

The meeting aims to intensify coordination among stakeholders to strengthen the capacities, systems, and services needed to detect, report and respond to serious public health events.

WHO proposes that, at a minimum, the initial phase of intensified preparedness focus on ensuring that all countries in Africa have the following capacities firmly in place on a functional and sustainable basis:

- A surveillance system that will cover the country from community to national levels and be adapted to relevant conditions, and which will use well-trained staff and proven information management systems;

- A central national emergency operation centre with capacities and resources to function as a central hub for national surveillance at all times, and as the central operational hub to be activated during health emergencies;

- Sustainable community engagement and risk communication strategies and resourced plans; and

- Critical laboratory diagnostic capacities with associated quality assessment processes.

Experts from United Nations agencies, African Union Commission, Southern African Development Community (SADC), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), World Bank, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, among others are participating in the 3-day meeting.

The meeting is hosted by the National Department of Health, South Africa.