



The Guardian of Public Health in the Western Pacific

Countries and areas of the WHO Western Pacific Region



The Guardian of Public Health in the Western Pacific



Photo credits:

Cover: ©WHO/Yoshi Shimizu









Inside pages: ©WHO/Yoshi Shimizu; ©AFP: p.12

WPR/2017/RDO/002

© World Health Organization 2017

Some rights reserved. This work is available under the CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO licence

Contents

- v  Message from the Regional Director
- vi  The World Health Organization in the Western Pacific Region
- 1  Building health systems that work for all
- 5  Fighting communicable diseases
- 9  Noncommunicable diseases in the modern world
- 13  A speedy response to outbreaks and emergencies
- 17  Tailored support for the Pacific
- 21  Health at the heart of the global development agenda



Message from the Regional Director

WHO in the Western Pacific Region is guided by an unwavering principle – keep countries at the centre of everything we do. Our support is people centred and country oriented, so that it is useful to our primary partners – our Member States.


Working in close collaboration with governments and ministries of health, we fight infectious diseases and noncommunicable diseases. We promote the health of mothers and children with initiatives such as First Embrace and immunization campaigns, and we closely monitor emerging and re-emerging health threats.

We work tirelessly to ensure the safety of our environment, our air, our water and our food – all of which impact health. We lead regional efforts to prepare for and rapidly respond to disasters and emergencies.

The Organization also collaborates closely with Member States to strengthen their health systems so that all people get the care they need without costs that can quickly overwhelm ordinary people.

And while we take pride in our achievements, we are honest about unfinished business – such as neglected tropical diseases. The WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific has introduced sweeping organizational reforms that have led to greater effectiveness, productivity and transparency. In an effort to achieve shared goals, we are collaborating with a broad range of actors in the health sector and beyond – other agencies, donors, foundations, nongovernmental organizations, academia and the private sector.

WHO is committed to supporting Member States in meeting the public health challenges of the 21st century. We never lose sight of the fact that we are dealing with issues of life and death. And with the stakes so high, we strive for excellence in working to bring better health and well-being to the nearly 1.9 billion people of the Western Pacific Region.



Shih Young-soo, MD, Ph.D.

WHO Regional Director
for the Western Pacific

The World Health Organization

About WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) was established on 7 April 1948 with an ambitious goal – ensure the highest attainable level of health for all people.

More than 7000 WHO staff members all over the world collaborate with governments and other partners to build a healthier world. WHO operates as an independent specialized agency of the United Nations.

WHO assists countries in building robust national health systems and in preparing for and responding to emergencies. We lead the fight against noncommunicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart disease, cancer and diabetes that cause millions of premature deaths every year.

WHO advocates universal health coverage, safe and effective medicines, and efforts to address health inequities and the social determinants of health. We are the undisputed leader in developing global public health norms, standards and guidance.

The Western Pacific Region

WHO's Western Pacific Region stretches across seven time zones and is home to more than one quarter of the world's population. The Region extends from the Mongolian steppes in central Asia, east to the Pitcairn Islands in the Pacific Ocean and south to New Zealand. It includes countries big (such as China, with 1.4 billion people) and small (such as Niue, home to just 1000 people), rich and poor, some with exploding populations and others that are rapidly ageing. Health systems and services are strong in some countries and weak in others.

Health outcomes across the Region have improved in recent decades, but serious challenges remain. More than 30 000 people die each day due to preventable chronic diseases. In many countries, childbirth remains a danger to both mother and child, and more than 4 million babies die each year before they reach 1 month. Established and emerging infectious diseases from tuberculosis to Zika virus disease pose real threats.

in the Western Pacific Region

And several of the world's most disaster-prone countries can be found here.

Still, there are promising signs. All Member States that once were considered low income now enjoy middle-income status – and the opportunities for quality health care that come with economic growth. But rapid development can be a double-edged sword, with negative health-related consequences – including environmental degradation and income and social inequities.

WHO is uniquely placed to deal with this array of modern public health challenges.


The WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific

WHO's Regional Office for the Western Pacific is an indispensable resource in the Region, with more than 600 skilled men and women devoted to the goal of

achieving better health outcomes for the Region's nearly 1.9 billion people. Headquartered in Manila, Philippines, the Regional Office coordinates the work of 15 country offices and works with health authorities and other partners in 37 countries and areas.

The Regional Office for the Western Pacific is squarely focused on responding to the specific needs and challenges of countries in the Region. It facilitates the sharing of knowledge among countries and serves as a hub for collaborative work. It helps translate global health initiatives into regional action plans.

The Regional Committee for the Western Pacific, comprised of representatives from Member States, is WHO's governing body in the Region. The Regional Committee meets every year to formulate policies, provide oversight for regional programmes, and consider, revise and endorse new initiatives.

A photograph of three children running happily on a dirt road in a rural village. The child in the foreground is a young boy in a white shirt and dark pants, running towards the camera. Behind him, another child in a plaid shirt and dark pants is walking, and further back, a third child in a yellow shirt and dark pants is running. The background shows a rustic wooden house, lush green trees, and a cloudy sky. The overall scene is bright and cheerful, capturing a moment of joy in a rural setting.

**WHO in the Western Pacific
Region supports every
country to provide lifelong,
affordable health care for all.**



Building health systems that work for all

When you are poor, the illness of one family member can bring financial disaster to your entire household. Even those more affluent can face financial ruin due to complicated or long-term illnesses.

Every year, 80 million people in the Western Pacific Region face financial hardship due to out-of-pocket payments for health services. This threatens individuals and families, as well as communities and economies.

WHO supports the efforts of every country to provide lifelong, affordable health care for all. Universal health coverage (UHC) depends on strong and well-managed health systems available to everyone – even the most disadvantaged. UHC covers all aspects of health services, from

cradle to grave. WHO and Member States developed *Universal Health Coverage: Moving Towards Better Health*, an action framework to achieve UHC. Suggested actions focus on the quality, efficiency, equity, accountability and sustainability of health services, with individuals, families and communities at the centre of all efforts.

WHO support for this agenda has many facets. Policy development, health sector reform and human resources are key elements. So are financing, hospitals and health centres, affordable medicines, information and evidence, research, and community voices. Health for all will be critical to achieve the ambitious aims of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Antimicrobial resistance – an urgent priority

Antibiotics are miracles of modern medicine. Diseases that once killed can now be cured by a few days of treatment. Most of us take this for granted, but we should not.


The overuse and misuse of antibiotics to treat illnesses – and their use in raising livestock – have increased the number of resistant infections worldwide and are jeopardizing life-saving treatment. Resistance to other antimicrobials, such as those that combat influenza, parasites and fungal infections, is also on the rise. As a result, common infections can become life-threatening.

In collaboration with Member States, an *Action Agenda for Antimicrobial Resistance in the Western Pacific Region* was launched in 2014 to guide development of national plans that focus on country-specific solutions. The action agenda has proven to be a critical step in addressing a global public health and development crisis that demands urgent attention.





“**Antibiotics** are **miracles** of **modern medicine**. **Diseases** that once killed **can now be cured**. But **misuse** of antibiotics is **jeopardizing** life-saving **treatments**.”



Fighting communicable diseases remains a major priority for WHO and its Member States – a long-term effort that is leading to healthier and longer lives.



Fighting communicable diseases

Communicable, or infectious, diseases have been the major cause of illness and death throughout history. Cholera, malaria, measles, pneumonia, smallpox and tuberculosis have been feared for centuries. In the last 100 years or so we have begun to understand the causes of these and other diseases and have been able to prevent or treat them with antibiotics, vaccinations and other tools.

Fighting communicable diseases remains a major priority for WHO and its Member States – a long-term effort leading to healthier and longer lives. Malaria cases have decreased 25% between 2002 and 2012, and deaths have fallen by 80% in the Western Pacific

Region. The incidence of tuberculosis has been cut by more than half since 1990, and deaths have been slashed by 73%. The Western Pacific Region has been certified as polio-free since 2000.

Many of these diseases are in retreat, but they have not been vanquished. Significant risks remain, and diseases can and do return quickly if control efforts are not sustained. Dengue, HIV, SARS and Zika are reminders that infectious diseases will continue to emerge and re-emerge. The battle against communicable diseases is crucial to well-being, and WHO in the Western Pacific Region is fully engaged in the fight.

Tackling viral hepatitis

Viral hepatitis is a significant public health threat in the Western Pacific Region, leading to liver disease and even liver cancer and death. The disease claims 1500 lives every day in the Region.

The fight against this scourge is gaining ground. New data show hepatitis B vaccinations across the Region will avert 7 million deaths among children born between 1990 and 2014 – a tremendous achievement. New and affordable medicines to treat hepatitis B are now available, and there finally is a cure for hepatitis C.

There is now an opportunity to finish the job. In line with the global goal to eliminate viral hepatitis as a public health threat by 2030, the *Regional Action Plan for Viral Hepatitis in the Western Pacific 2016–2020* envisions a Region free of new hepatitis infections and where people with chronic hepatitis can access affordable and effective treatment.






“ Hepatitis B **vaccinations** across the Region will **avert 7 million deaths** among children born between 1990 and 2014. ”

**Noncommunicable diseases
are now responsible for
four out of five deaths in the
Western Pacific Region.**



Noncommunicable diseases in the modern world



Environmental threats and modern lifestyles pose real challenges to health, safety, and physical and mental well-being. Climate change, rapid and unplanned urbanization, and unsafe roads, homes, communities, schools and workplaces all impact health. So does easy access to and pervasive marketing of alcohol, tobacco, and calorie-rich but nutrient-poor food and drinks. Physical inactivity can lead to overweight and obesity. All of these factors increase vulnerability to heart attacks and strokes, diabetes, chronic respiratory ailments and other diseases. NCDs are now responsible for four out of five deaths in the Western Pacific Region, and depression is now the leading contributor to disability worldwide.

The WHO in the Western Pacific Region supports countries in scaling up whole-of-government and

whole-of-society approaches to mitigate the health impacts of negative behavioural, cultural, environmental and social influences. Health promotion, advocacy for policy and legislation, and community education and empowerment help ensure that the places in which we live, work, learn and play are healthy. The Tobacco Free Initiative is a good example – advocating taxation, legislation, plain packaging and protection from second-hand smoke to help countries create healthier environments.

Governments alone cannot solve the problem. Individuals, communities and organized groups must collaborate. WHO works with governments, communities, partners and a variety of stakeholders to build healthier environments and support inclusive health services, with a special focus on marginalized populations.

First Embrace – a good start for a good life

Despite progress in decreasing child mortality, more than half of children who die before their fifth birthday are newborns. Premature birth, low birthweight and severe infections often turn joy into tragedy. But a few simple steps taken immediately after birth can save more than 50 000 young lives each year in the Region. WHO calls these steps Early Essential Newborn Care (EENC) or First Embrace.


Immediate and thorough drying followed by skin-to-skin contact between mother and baby, timely cutting of the umbilical cord with sterile instruments, and early and exclusive breast-feeding are simple and cost-effective steps that can prevent a majority of newborn deaths. These actions can be carried out in all settings where mothers give birth and benefit all newborns.

WHO in the Western Pacific Region has coached thousands of health workers who now implement EENC in health facilities, and government partners, policy-makers and future parents have been engaged in EENC through advocacy and strategic communications.





“ A few **simple steps** taken immediately **after birth can save** more than 50 000 **young lives** each year in the Region.”

A photograph showing two healthcare workers from behind, running down a brightly lit hospital hallway. They are wearing full-body blue protective suits, including hoods and gloves. The worker on the left is carrying a blue and white medical bag. The worker on the right is holding a clipboard. The hallway has a light-colored floor with shadows cast by the workers. In the background, there are white walls, a door, and a yellow protective garment hanging on a rack.

**Working together to
manage health security
threats and emergencies**

A speedy response to outbreaks and emergencies

The world faces complex health security threats from disease outbreaks, natural disasters and conflicts. In the Western Pacific Region, these health security threats occur regularly, often in unpredictable ways that challenge even the most advanced health systems.

WHO's approach to outbreaks and emergencies recently underwent historic change with the establishment of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme, which added on-the-ground response capacity to the Organization's traditional technical and standard-setting roles.

For over a decade, the *Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases* served as effective guidance for Member States to meet the

capacity requirements mandated under the International Health Regulations (2005). An updated strategy, the *Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies*, continues to guide Member States in further strengthening their fundamental systems for health security, including through developing and implementing national action plans.

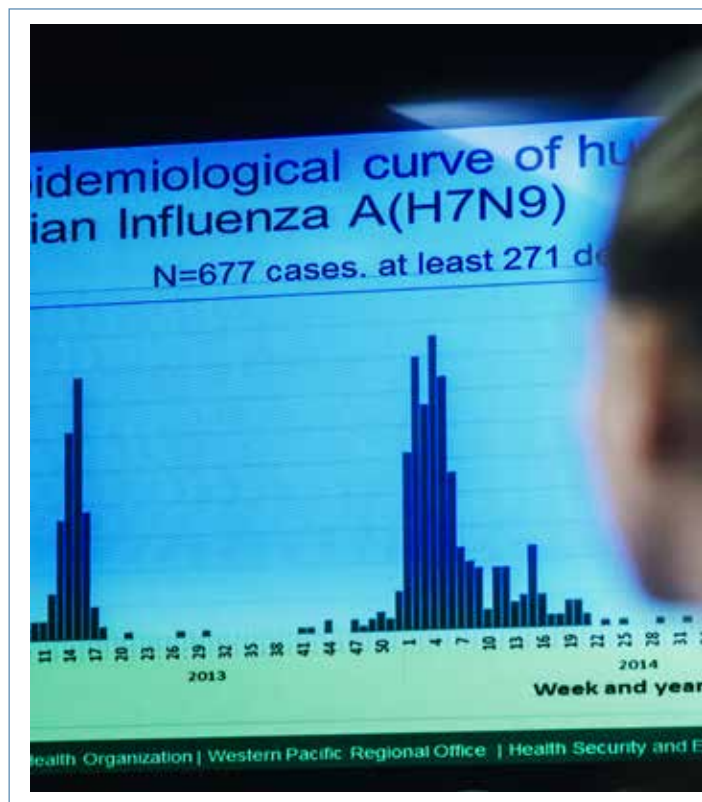
The Emergency Operations Centre at the Regional Office for the Western Pacific is at the heart of health emergency management in the Region. It connects expertise, information, stakeholders and all levels of WHO to ensure effective preparedness and a coordinated timely response to emerging diseases, natural disasters and other health security threats.

Preparing for the next pandemic response

When China notified WHO about human infections of the A(H7N9) strain of avian influenza in March 2013, it presented a significant global challenge. Within 24 hours, mechanisms mandated by the International Health Regulations (2005) were triggered. The Emergency Operations Centre at the WHO Regional Office for the Western Pacific quickly launched round-the-clock monitoring and risk assessments. The EOC also put the right people with the right expertise in the right roles to ensure an effective response, which limited the outbreak and saved lives.

The 2013 emergence of A(H7N9) avian influenza and other avian influenza outbreaks in the Region serve as reminders that influenza virus subtypes are a constant threat. The outbreaks highlighted the importance of surveillance, risk assessment and strong response systems, as well as the ability of WHO to work with Member States in mounting a rapid and effective response.

Preparing for the next pandemic – wherever it emerges from – is a top priority for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme.





“ During the first **outbreak** of the **A(H7N9)** strain of avian influenza in 2013 the **quick response** limited the outbreak and **saved lives.** ”

WHO provides tailored support in the Pacific, guided by the Healthy Islands vision.





Tailored support for the Pacific

The Pacific island countries and areas are diverse in culture and language, but they share many health challenges.

Rates of premature death from NCDs are among the world's highest. Communicable diseases such as hepatitis and tuberculosis continue to be a major health burden, and persistent tropical diseases such as lymphatic filariasis and yaws persist. Low-lying islands are vulnerable to climate change and rising sea levels. Unsafe drinking-water and inadequate sanitation can trigger outbreaks of dengue and typhoid. Natural disasters ravage communities and local economies.

The Healthy Islands vision adopted by Pacific health ministers in 1995 continues to guide collaboration. It envisions a region where

“children are nurtured in body and mind, environments invite learning and leisure, people work and age with dignity, ecological balance is a source of pride and the ocean which sustains us is protected”.

The Division of Pacific Technical Support was established in 2010 in Fiji. The new division expanded the role of the WHO Representative Office in the South Pacific providing tailored support to the region. WHO's work has led to stronger capacity for health management and planning. Immunizations have increased, and schools and communities are promoting healthy living. Primary health care is better equipped to meet the NCD crisis. And the health sector is better prepared to deal with public health emergencies and the impact of climate change.

Bringing medical education to the Pacific

Success in meeting the complex health challenges in the Pacific depends on skilled medical professionals. WHO is helping meet this need by building capacity in workforce planning and medical training.

In recent years, WHO has supported more than 60 medical students from 11 countries to study overseas. But for the majority of health professionals this is not an option: they need to be able to study at home. Vast distances and small populations once made high-quality education a challenge – until the advent of the Internet.

To boost training of health professionals in the region, WHO supports the Pacific Open Learning Health Net (POLHN), an online platform established in 2003 by Pacific health ministers. With sponsored online training as well as free, self-paced courses, POLHN now hosts 45 learning centres across the subregion, providing health education to more than 16 000 health workers every year.






“**WHO** is helping meet the need for skilled health and medical professionals in the Pacific by **building capacity** in workforce planning and **medical training**. Online learning brings **health education** to more than **16 000 health workers** in the Pacific every year.”



Health is at the heart
of the 2030 Agenda for
Sustainable Development.



Health at the heart of the global development agenda



For 15 years, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were a driving force in addressing many issues affecting the health of people all over the world. Despite significant strides towards achievement of the goals, progress was uneven and further efforts were needed to eradicate fully a wide range of diseases and address a variety of persistent and emerging health issues.

In September 2015, world leaders gathered at the United Nations in New York to adopt the ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs. While the MDGs focused on poor countries,

the SDGs focus on poor people in every country.

Health is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 SDGs, which aim to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure the prosperity and well-being of all. Although SDG 3 specifically targets good health and well-being, health is integral to all goals – and all goals are influenced by health.

In order to achieve the SDGs by 2030, everyone has a role to play: governments, the private sector, civil society, organizations such as WHO, and people like you.

Partnering to create a happier, healthier future

Significant improvements in public health have taken place in the Western Pacific Region in recent years. Life-threatening infectious diseases such as polio have been largely eradicated, and others such as malaria are targeted for elimination. Infant mortality rates have fallen, and the risk factors for the NCDs that account for the vast majority of preventable deaths are being forcefully addressed. Still, there is much to be done.

At a time when resources are shrinking and health needs are expanding, it is imperative for the health sector to create strategic partnerships with other sectors – environment, transportation, labour and education – to achieve shared goals.

WHO will continue to work hand in hand with Member States and a wide range of stakeholders including governments, communities, United Nations agencies, nongovernmental organizations, academic institutions and the private sector to achieve its mandate – the highest attainable level of health for all people.

To learn more about WHO's efforts to bring better health to the 1.9 billion people of the Western Pacific Region, contact us at WPRpartnerships@who.int





“ By **working together**
we can safeguard the
rights of people all over
the world and help them
live longer, healthier
and happier **lives.** ”



 facebook.com/whowpro

 [@whowpro](https://twitter.com/whowpro)

 youtube.com/whowpro

 www.wpro.who.int