

Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on
Water and Health to the Convention on
the Protection and Use of Transboundary
Watercourses and International Lakes

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Prevention and reduction of water-related diseases

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**Brief summary of the national workshop on water-related disease surveillance
and outbreak response in Armenia (Yerevan, 4-6 June 2018)**

Background and objective

Establishing, improving and maintaining comprehensive national and local surveillance and early warning systems for water-related disease, contingency plans and response capacities are core provisions of the Protocol on Water and Health. At the fourth session of the Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol (Geneva, 14-16 November 2016), and subsequently at the tenth meeting of the Working Group on Water and Health (Geneva, 15-16 November 2017), Armenia requested technical support from the WHO Regional Office for Europe to build capacity on effective approaches to water-related disease surveillance and outbreak management, based on internationally recognized good practices.

The workshop aimed at supporting the country's efforts to strengthen surveillance of water-related diseases and waterborne outbreak management with the specific objectives to:

- Introduce key provisions of the Protocol, in particular those addressing water-related disease surveillance and early warning systems;
- Provide an overview of water-related diseases in the WHO European Region, including available evidence on waterborne outbreaks;
- Review the situation of water-related diseases and the outbreak surveillance system in Armenia;
- Discuss main approaches to surveillance and share good practice examples in building effective surveillance systems for water-related diseases;
- Introduce key principles and elements of outbreak management and methods and tools for epidemiological investigation of waterborne outbreaks, including practical exercises based on concrete case studies; and
- Discuss key challenges and identify actions towards improving the water-related disease surveillance and outbreak response systems in the country.

Proceedings and outcomes

This capacity-building workshop draw upon the expertise of national and local professionals and was technically supported by the Norwegian Institute of Public Health and the WHO European Centre for Health and Environment. The workshop was attended by 35 epidemiology and hygiene specialists from the Armenian National Centre for Disease Control and Prevention and its regional branches.

This workshop was an opportunity to provide Armenian authorities an overview of water-related diseases in the pan-European region and in the country and introduce key principles of effective management of water-related outbreaks.

The most prevailing gastrointestinal disease registered in Armenia is shigellosis. The burden of hepatitis A infections has been reduced in the past 10 years. The regulatory framework on surveillance and outbreak management of infectious diseases is well established and enforced in Armenia, and overall there is good knowledge and experience of epidemiologists and public health specialists in undertaking surveillance and outbreak investigation. Outbreak management teams are established and coordination between different sectors and stakeholders are operational at the national and local levels; as well as between the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) and district public health authorities.

The participants discussed key challenges and identified the following actions towards improving water-related diseases surveillance and outbreak management in the country:

- Update the national guideline on outbreak management by adding specific aspects related to waterborne outbreaks (e.g. environmental investigation, risk assessment of water supply systems);
- Improve coordination/collaboration with water service providers and build capacity on the risk-based management approach in drinking-water supply, including requirements for operational monitoring;
- Conduct refresher trainings to ensure continuous enforcement of the Government decree on contingency planning (2012), in particular risk communication aspects;
- Develop and update pre-fabricated and pre-approved public health messages (e.g. boil water advisory) to further support effective risk communication and outbreak management activities;
- Consider preparation of a case study of the Armenian experiences and lessons learnt, based on the recent waterborne outbreaks.

Post-training evaluation by the participants showed that the training strengthened their understanding of types and approaches for effective surveillance of water-related diseases, risk communication and methods of epidemiological investigation of waterborne outbreaks, including hands-on exercises on the application of a statistical tool EpiInfo 7.