



UNITED NATIONS

Pandemic Influenza Contingency, UNSIC

Experts at WHO agree that the world may be on the brink of another pandemic. Deadly influenza pandemics have struck repeatedly throughout human history: tens of millions were killed in the pandemic of 1918 and there is considerable evidence of high mortality influenza stretching back a 1000 years.

The resurgence of a highly pathogenic avian influenza virus (H5N1) has led decision-makers to focus on the importance of pandemic preparedness. The last three pandemics this century were bird flu viruses that mutated into a human virus. This has increased fears that the virus could mutate to become transmissible from human to human. Since 2003, H5N1 has spread to 41 countries, causing the loss of more than 300 million poultry in Asia alone and 190 deaths worldwide.

Pandemic Influenza Contingency (PIC) was created as part of United Nations System Influenza Coordination (UNSIC) with the support of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). PIC supports efforts of the UN, national governments and the humanitarian community to be prepared to face an influenza pandemic.

The consequences of a pandemic can be widespread. Experience with HIV/AIDS and SARS shows that in addition to public health response, other sectors must also be mobilised to reduce vulnerability and to mitigate social, economic and humanitarian consequences. Pandemics can disrupt the systems on which people depend for their security, livelihoods and welfare. Vital infrastructure and basic services, availability of food, water, and electricity will be disrupted. Where the World Health Organisation (WHO) and its partners will lead the public health response, PIC will focus on wider preparedness measures.

PIC Regional Officers bring together inter-agency efforts under regional coordination arrangements – sharing information, assessments, and good practice. Regional Officers bring priority assistance to at-risk countries and mobilise technical support as needed.

Our core business is to improve readiness and demonstrate progress through on-line measurement. We respond to requests from countries in need with different tools, from simulation exercises, to direct assistance missions, to sharing knowledge.

The Team

As an inter-agency network, PIC is comprised of staff seconded from donors and UN agencies. A core team is based in Geneva. Support to the field is conducted through Regional Officers.



Objectives

The Pandemic Influenza Contingency (PIC) team will:

1. Improve the readiness of the UN system around the world to cope with a sudden pandemic — to guard the health and safety of staff and be able to assist affected countries;
2. Assist national authorities (through UN Country Teams) to improve the preparedness of their country beyond the health sector, and;
3. Help national actors and their international partners to prepare for delivery of humanitarian assistance in a pandemic.

Strategy

The overall PIC strategy combines 'measurement, advocacy and support':

Measurement:

PIC will use an on-line tracker to map indicators of preparedness. Building upon available baseline data, PIC will measure progress, analyse results, and design or modify its assistance tools accordingly.

Advocacy:

PIC advocates for greater pandemic readiness. PIC Regional Officers coordinate regional inter-agency initiatives.

Support:

PIC will primarily help UNCTs prepare, and help them assist their host governments when requested. Examples of such assistance include simulations or 'desktop testing' of existing plans or missions to actually provide help in situ.