

»» Pandemics: Improving preparedness and response effectiveness

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Author: Dr Anna-Maria von Roda

Editor: Nadine Kuch

The impacts of globalisation have presented new health security challenges for the international community. New technologies and more open markets have resulted in a heavier flow of people, goods and services around the world. But increasing mobility also means that health risks such as infections are quickly transferred. A dangerous infectious disease breaks out somewhere in the world on an almost daily basis. If it is discovered too late or goes undetected, it could quickly spread across national borders and become a pandemic. SARS, bird flu, swine flu, the Ebola crisis of 2014-15 and the latest outbreaks in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda underline the highly topical nature of this issue.

High economic costs from outbreaks

The impacts of a pandemic reach far beyond the health sector and the nations affected; for instance, affecting trade and transportation – and, in turn, the countries' economic development.

Despite the requirements set out in the International Health Regulations (IHR), which have been a binding part of international law since 2007, measures to prevent epidemics have been insufficient in many countries. When it comes to pandemic prevention in particular, it is clear that international coordination and national-level support are important for ensuring that healthcare is guaranteed as a global public good. Halting future pandemic threats will also reduce the economic costs that would arise both locally and for the international community. In the case of the Ebola crisis alone, these costs came to around USD 53 billion.

Strong health systems for preparedness and effective crisis response

It will never be possible to completely prevent the outbreak of diseases – that much is clear. However, faster detection and more effective response efforts can guard against outbreaks weakening health systems and turning into epidemics or even pandemics. In this context, strengthening health systems in developing countries will play a crucial role in fostering both their own resilience and global health security.

There are different system levels at which progress can begin to be made:

- By building surveillance and laboratory capacity, diseases can be discovered more quickly so that effective countermeasures can be taken.
- By providing emergency services infrastructure and introducing clear processes for crisis scenarios, it is possible to locally contain an outbreak and quickly get help to victims.
- By training health workers and raising public awareness, the transmission of diseases from person to person or animal to person can be prevented, among other things.
- By preventatively using vaccines on a comprehensive scale and developing new vaccines, outbreaks can be headed off and diseases can be rooted out.

One example of strengthening pandemic preparedness in this vein is the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), which was founded as a global partnership between public, private and philanthropic institutions as a result of

the Ebola crisis. CEPI aims to develop vaccines against pathogens that could pose a worldwide threat.

Financial protection against the impacts of pandemics

In response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014, the G20 nations called on the World Bank to develop new financing mechanisms to make it possible to respond to the economic impacts of pandemics. The Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility (PEF) was subsequently founded in partnership with the insurance industry. After a dangerous infectious disease with a high risk of spreading breaks out, the pandemic insurance plan is designed to quickly facilitate early assistance payments to developing countries.

Implementation and practical challenges

In signing up to the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goals, the international community has committed itself to containing the spread of infectious diseases. Action is necessary and the solutions are known. But there are challenges to ensuring financing for pandemic preparedness in the world's poorest countries, with preventative measures often not treated as a high enough priority, for instance. The lack of resilience from systems also makes it difficult to make long-term preparations for outbreaks. There is an urgent need for action in all areas. ■