

Summary report on the

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Regional consultation on the availability and safety of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies

Tunis, Tunisia
15–16 May 2016



**World Health
Organization**

Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean

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1. Introduction

Blood transfusion is an essential component of emergency health care. Almost 75% of countries and more than 76 million people in the Eastern Mediterranean Region are affected by humanitarian emergencies, including almost 16 million refugees or internally displaced people. Some of the most challenged countries in the world, with either humanitarian crisis or complex emergency, are in this Region, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Palestine, Somalia, Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen.

The safety and availability of blood and blood products is a great concern in countries affected by humanitarian emergencies where health systems have been weakened or destroyed as a result of armed conflict, displacement of populations, and other complex emergencies. These emergencies increase the demand for blood and blood products and at the same time make delivery of these lifesaving products challenging, complex, and requiring coordination and cooperation among all stakeholders. However, across the Region, there is a lack of information on the emergency preparedness and response capacity of the blood transfusion services and on the challenges countries face in meeting the needs of the patient population during emergencies.

The WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean convened a regional consultation on the availability and safety of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies from 15 to 16 May 2016. The objectives of the consultation were:

- to review the status, successes, challenges and lessons learned in ensuring the availability and safety of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies;
- to develop recommendations and an action plan to address the challenges and to strengthen blood transfusion services to respond

to the increased demand for blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies.

Directors of blood transfusion services in Afghanistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Pakistan, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan and Syrian Arab Republic attended the consultation. Participants also included experts from Indonesia, the Netherlands, Tunisia, United Kingdom, and Zimbabwe and representatives of international and regional organizations, including Africa Society of Blood Transfusion, Arab Transfusion Medicine Forum, Médecins Sans Frontières, as well as staff from WHO headquarters and Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

In his welcoming message, delivered by Dr Syed Jafar Hussain, Acting WHO Representative for Tunisia, Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, emphasized the importance of addressing the safety and availability of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies. He emphasized the need to include a blood transfusion services emergency preparedness and response plan in the overall emergency preparedness and response effort at all levels. He reaffirmed WHO's commitment to supporting all Member States in building their capacity to deliver safe blood transfusion during emergencies.

2. Summary of discussions

Over the last 10 years, on average, 700 emergencies affecting more than 250 million people and causing 110 000 deaths (excluding deaths from conflict) are reported globally every year. During emergencies, health care is increasingly under attack with violence committed against patients, facilities and workers.

The Region has a number of high-level and protracted emergencies that affect almost three quarters of countries and place a significant burden on countries' blood transfusion services. Mass population displacements have resulted in almost 16 million refugees and internally displaced persons. Four countries in the Region host more than half of the world's refugees (Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, and Lebanon). This has posed significant challenges in ensuring the availability and safety of blood transfusion for patients in need.

Survey conducted by the WHO Regional Office showed that the type and complexity of emergencies in the Region has changed over the last 10 years. There are an increasing number of conflicts and wars, explosions, acts of terrorism, refugees and population movements. The demand for blood and blood products to meet the needs of populations affected by these emergencies has also increased. At the same time, delivery of these lifesaving products has become more challenging.

The most common weak points in the blood supply during emergencies, identified by the survey, were fragmented organization of blood transfusion services, shortcomings in numbers and competence of human resources, shortages in supply of consumables, shortcomings in infrastructure, transport and cold chain deficits, shortage in finances, and ineffective and limited coordination and collaboration among relevant stakeholders.

To respond to the challenges, some countries have developed and implemented a blood transfusion services emergency preparedness and response plan as part of the overall national emergency preparedness and response effort. However, there are countries in complex emergencies that have not yet developed a plan to address the challenges.

Participants stressed the need to include blood transfusion services emergency preparedness and response as part of the overall emergency preparedness and response plan by all stakeholders at all levels to reduce death, suffering and disabilities associated with lack of access to safe blood transfusion during emergencies. The plan should be evidence based, practical, regularly updated and communicated to relevant stakeholders. In addition, participants emphasized the need for blood transfusion services to actively participate in the planning and implementation of national emergency preparedness and response activities.

Participants also highlighted the need to integrate the blood transfusion services emergency preparedness and response plan into the quality management system of blood transfusion services. The plan should include policies and procedures to ensure safety of donors, personnel and visitors, and the blood supply. The plan should also be validated and personnel should be trained to implement it.

Procedures to address an acute increase in demand for blood and blood products immediately after a disaster; as well as, in some instances, sudden influx of a large number of people to donate blood should be in place. Blood collection, processing and clinical use should follow standards, even during such disasters, to maintain the safety and clinical efficacy of blood transfusion. In this regard, it is important to put in place mechanisms for management of mass casualty, including rapid mobilization of resources and staff. In addition, use of technologies, such as blood salvage devices and availability of alternatives to blood transfusion will save lives. Participants emphasized the need for appropriate regulations and organizational structure for disaster management in order to implement a blood transfusion services emergency preparedness and response plan.

Country presentations (Afghanistan, Libya, Palestine, Syrian Arab Republic, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Lebanon, Pakistan and Syrian Arab Republic) showed the presence of different preparedness measures to ensure access to safe blood in humanitarian settings. The presentations gave a good overview of some of the common issues and lessons learned in affected countries. It was noted that there are success stories in the Region that should be widely shared.

The second day of the meeting was dedicated to working groups. Participants discussed the challenges in providing blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies, and identified strategies, measures, procedures and priority actions that need to be taken to improve the capacity of blood transfusion services for emergency preparedness and response, which are summarized in the recommendations below.

3. Recommendations

To countries

1. Identify and work closely with authorities responsible for national emergency preparedness and response in order to highlight the importance of including blood transfusion services in overall national emergency preparedness and response activities.
2. Collect updated information on factors affecting provision of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies, and strategies, measures, procedures and priority actions to meet the increased demand for blood and blood products and blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies.
3. Develop an action plan with clearly defined priority actions, timeline and responsible party to improve capacity of blood transfusion services for emergency preparedness and response.

4. Identify technical and financial assistance needs to improve capacity blood transfusion services for emergency preparedness and response.
5. Strengthen coordination and collaboration among relevant stakeholders to develop and implement an action plan to improve capacity blood transfusion services for emergency preparedness and response.

To WHO

6. Finalize and disseminate the proceedings of the consultation, and the report of the survey, including literature review, on the availability and safety of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies.
7. Develop a draft regional action plan, based on the recommendations, to improve the capacity of blood transfusion services for emergency preparedness and response capacity.
8. Share the draft regional action plan with meeting participants and other reviewers not represented in the meeting, for review and finalization.
9. Assist countries in developing, adapting and implementing their national action plans in line with the regional action plan.
10. Allocate or mobilize sufficient human and financial resources to support the implementation of the regional action plan.
11. Facilitate publication of a thematic issue on availability and safety of blood transfusion during humanitarian emergencies in the Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal.
12. Review existing guidelines and tools to see what information may be leveraged for future guidance on this topic; and develop a short guidance document on managing blood transfusion services in humanitarian settings, including global minimum standards.



World Health Organization
Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean
P.O. Box 7608, Nasr City 11371
Cairo, Egypt
www.emro.who.int