

WHO Informal Consultation on Influenza Vaccine Response during the Start of a Pandemic

Geneva, Switzerland

29 June to 1 July 2015

1. Background

In June 2013, WHO published a revision of the pandemic influenza preparedness and response guidance, titled, [*Pandemic Influenza Risk Management \(PIRM\) –WHO interim guidance*](#). This guidance placed an emphasis on a cooperative risk management approach, maximized country and region flexibility, and incorporated lessons from the 2009 influenza A(H1N1) pandemic.

One lesson learnt from the 2009 pandemic is that countries may experience an influenza pandemic at different times and may face different levels of impact. The WHO PIRM framework provides flexibility to individual countries for risk-based national response, including a pandemic vaccine response.

WHO, through its established mechanism the Global Influenza Surveillance and Response System (GISRS), will continue the detection, characterization and assessment of risks associated with an emerging viruses of pandemic potential. For an emerging novel virus, based on risk assessment, irrelevant to whether the virus would eventually lead to a pandemic or not, GISRS will coordinate its various entities developing high-growth reassortants suitable for vaccine development, rapidly distribute them to manufacturers for evaluation and develop corresponding potency reagents. Meanwhile jointly with epidemiological institutions worldwide, GISRS will monitor the spread and epidemiology of the pandemic/pandemic potential virus, and provide scientific advice to the Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) on recommendations of vaccination should such pre-pandemic/pandemic vaccines available.

While the overall framework has been set up, practical details are yet to be filled in. The issue of pandemic vaccine response is not only challenged by tight timeframe from virus detection to vaccine available in markets, but also complicated with the seasonal vaccine – its production and use when a pandemic virus is circulating , and existing contracts within countries, as well as the fact that the global vaccine production capacity is extremely unevenly distributed in the world.

In order to best prepare for the next pandemic, in particular vaccine response, there is an urgent need for WHO to convene consultations with stakeholders to better understand the complexities and develop corresponding response strategies.

2. Scope and purpose

The meeting aims to develop a global strategy and operational mechanisms of pandemic vaccine response during the period of the start of a pandemic when seasonal influenza may still be circulating at considerable levels in parts of the world and when seasonal influenza vaccine may be in the middle of its production cycle.

3. Objectives

The objectives are to:

1. Understand better the complexities of pandemic vaccine response during the period of the start of pandemic, including
 - a. Technical challenges
 - b. National pandemic vaccine response policies vs. global policies
 - c. Vaccine manufacturing challenges
2. Discuss response strategies through scenario exercise, from various perspectives including:
 - a. Influenza epidemiology
 - b. Severity
 - c. Status of seasonal vaccine production cycle
 - d. Other considerations that might affect global response decisions
3. Discuss implementation mechanisms corresponding to above strategies of various scenarios.

4. Expected outcomes

- A better understanding of the complexities of pandemic vaccine response during the period of the start of a pandemic.
- A matrix of scenarios in terms of pandemic vaccine response.
- A draft framework of scenario-based response strategies and corresponding implementation mechanisms.

5. Participants

Experts and representatives from:

- WHO Collaborating Centres and Essential Regulatory Laboratories of WHO GISRS
- National authorities coordinating national/regional pandemic response
- National epidemiology institutions
- Influenza vaccine manufacturers
- National regulatory agencies
- Research and academic laboratories, institutions and organizations
- Relevant expert/advisory groups

6. Outlines of agenda

- Overview of the current WHO pandemic preparedness plan and the current pandemic threats
- Overview of existing national/regional policies of pandemic vaccine response during the period of the start of a pandemic
- Review of main various scenarios related to pandemic vaccine response during the period of the start of a pandemic
- Discussion and development response strategies and operational mechanisms corresponding to each main scenario.