



FACILITATION (FAL) DIVISION — TWELFTH SESSION

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Agenda Item 6: International Health Regulations (IHRs)

**MEDICAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS – HARMONIZED
CONTINGENCY PHASED RESPONSE PLAN FOR AIRPORTS**

(Presented by the Secretariat)

SUMMARY

This paper presents an outline of a model contingency phased response plan for airports aimed at preventing the spread by air travel of communicable diseases. When implemented, the plan enhances the preparedness for a future outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) or a similar disease. The range of the plan extends from a normal situation to a full scale epidemic and takes into account three major considerations: triggers, level of response and activation/deactivation of the plan.

Action by the Division is in paragraph 8.1.

1. PURPOSE

1.1 The guidelines outlined in this paper are intended to assist airports in drawing up a harmonized contingency phased response plan to address:

- a) the possible resurgence of SARS; and
- b) another outbreak of a communicable disease of similar import to public health.

2. REQUIREMENTS

2.1 An airport would set out in the guidelines policies and procedures for a phased response plan to cover the purpose stated above.

2.2 The phased response plan would usually cover the spectrum from end to end, ranging from a “no-disease” or normal situation to a situation with both local and international outbreaks of the disease. At this end of the spectrum, all the measures outlined in Phase I of the recommended anti-SARS protective measures for airports should be in place. (See FAL/12-WP/32)

3. DEFINITIONS

3.1 The airport or the relevant national authority shall define the content of the various phases in the contingency plan. The starting point shall be a situation in which there is no evidence of the disease, either locally or internationally. Subsequently, the contingency plan would call for a stepped-up response to cater to an increase in the severity of the situation.

3.2 The various phases (steps) in the contingency plan would ideally be denoted in either a numerical scheme or a colour coded scheme. Such a scheme may take into consideration the national policy prevailing at that time.

3.3 The contingency plan should have time lines indicating the expected time to achieve each upscaling in response. Such time lines will have to take into consideration the manpower and equipment resources needed at every step.

4. PARTICIPATING AGENCIES

4.1 The airport should draw up a list of the agencies that will be involved in the contingency plan. An organizational chart detailing the working relationship between these agencies should be developed and adopted. Such an organizational chart will usually have the contact details of the organization as well as the key personnel involved in the contingency phased response plan.

4.2 The focal point for coordination from the airport would be the designated airport public health official.

5. TRIGGER(S)

5.1 The contingency plan would detail the triggers for each step of the phased response. Under the expected circumstances, these triggers would be:

- a) a notification from the World Health Organization (WHO) global alert and response system;
- b) a national alert signifying a change in the prevailing disease pattern; and/or
- c) a regional alert from countries around the airport.

It is recognized that in larger countries a national alert may be confined to a single city or a few cities within the country. In this situation, only the affected airports would need to activate the response plan.

5.2 Specific triggers

5.2.1 For the start of screening of embarking passengers:

- a) The contingency plan would define the starting point for implementing the screening of embarking passengers within the overall phased response plan. This would usually be when WHO indicates that local transmission of the disease has occurred from an index case.

- b) The measures to be instituted shall be those detailed in Phase I of the ICAO SARS-project (Recommended anti-SARS protective measures) pertaining to the screening of embarking passengers.
- c) The contingency plan can also designate a point in time for deactivating the screening of embarking passengers. This would usually be upon declaration by WHO that its criteria for a disease-free situation are met. Usually the period of no local transmission must be twice the incubation time.

5.2.2 For the start of screening of disembarking passengers:

- a) The airport may consider screening of disembarking passengers following an alert from the WHO global alert and response system indicating the outbreak of disease in one or more countries. This would be particularly relevant if the affected country or countries had direct air links with the airport. It must be recognized that it may be possible for infected passengers to transit through airports that do not have direct air links to the airport instituting the contingency plan.
- b) The measures to be instituted shall be those detailed in Phase I of the ICAO SARS-project (Recommended anti-SARS protective measures) pertaining to the screening of disembarking passengers.
- c) As in the situation for embarking passengers, the airport contingency plan can designate a point in time to stand down and cease the screening activities. This would usually follow a declaration by WHO indicating a disease free situation in the affected countries/cities.

6. **COMMAND, COMMUNICATION AND COORDINATION**

6.1 The airport contingency plan should have the basic elements of Command, Coordination and Communication clearly outlined.

6.2 There should be a clear indication in the plan as to the authority that can activate the contingency measures. Such an authority would usually be the relevant Health Ministry. The focal point for activation of the airport plan should also be clearly defined. Moreover, the plan should have an activation list of the other personnel required for effective implementation of all activities associated with each step increase in the response. The person(s) responsible for activating these personnel should also be indicated.

6.3 The communication network between the various agencies involved in the contingency plan should be clearly spelt out. An important aspect would be the transmission of information to the media for the education of the public in order to prevent a panic situation from arising. This should be done through the appropriate authority.

6.4 It is recognized that an important element in the airport contingency plan is the designation of ambulances and hospitals. The plan should indicate the appropriate authority for designating the ambulances and the hospital(s).

6.5 The contingency plan should also identify the need to designate an emergency response room (control centre). This room would be equipped to be the nerve centre for the activation and implementation of the contingency plan.

7. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 *Contingency plan for airport workers.* The plan should also address the situation in which an airport worker may be infected and, as a result of that, a disruption of the activities of the airport would occur. Sufficient thought should be given in the plan to overcome such disruptions.

7.2 *Drills and exercises.* The appropriate measures to ensure that the contingency plan remains workable and effective would form part of the plan. This would normally entail the conduct of appropriate periodic drills and exercises to ensure that all elements of the contingency plan are implementable. A continuous process of review of the contingency plan would normally be expected to take place. An audit process by the national authority should be put in place.

7.3 *Other communicable diseases.* This contingency plan can essentially also apply to the outbreak of any other infectious disease that could be spread by air travel. It is, however, recognized that the mode of transmission of such diseases could be different from SARS. Similarly, the cardinal signs and symptoms of the disease may differ from SARS. In such a situation, the institution of screening measures for passengers would be dependant on the WHO criteria applicable to the disease in question.

8. ACTION BY THE DIVISION

8.1 The Division is invited to consider the model outline of a harmonized contingency phased response plan for airports as presented above and to recommend adoption of this approach to health emergency preparedness by all Contracting States.

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