

MENA INFLUENZA STAKEHOLDERS NETWORK NEWSLETTER - 5

November 11, 2015

MENA Influenza Stakeholder Network (MENA-ISN) has completed its first year with success. MENA-ISN held a total of 3 meetings where the group discussed about the existing gaps in influenza programmes in regional countries, actions to be taken to increase influenza awareness and vaccination coverage rates to be aligned with WHO target rates. Need for local data to support informed decisions by local health authorities to reduce the burden of influenza in the region were also among the discussion topics. MENA-ISN meetings were technically supported by WHO and this technical support will continue as long as the activities and achievements of MENA-ISN are aligned with WHO goals. MENA-ISN has thus far:

- completed the country influenza mappings
- defined a clear mission and prepared a strategic plan which has been well accepted by WHO
- defined country level actions to be taken to increase influenza awareness during upcoming 2015-2016 influenza season
- held meetings that were attended by WHO speakers and by distinguished scientists on influenza

■ started close interactions with WHO/Geneva and EMRO

- WHO hosted MENA-ISN at the HQ in Geneva during 3rd MENA-ISN meeting in Geneva, and delivered several presentations to the group on how to document and reduce the burden of influenza in the region.
- WHO/EMRO invited a MENA-ISN member to attend "Inter-Country Meeting of The Eastern Mediterranean Acute Respiratory Infection Surveillance (EMARIS) Network" that was held on September 14-16, 2015, Amman, Jordan. Dr. Hisham Tarraf, kindly took the task on behalf of MENA-ISN and presented the aim and plan of MENA-ISN during this meeting.

The season is about to start in our region and some countries have already started on influenza awareness campaigns and some have already started taking the actions listed in their action plans.

In this issue of the first newsletter of the 2015-2016 season, activities done in countries and epidemiological update on influenza activity will be covered. As you will notice MENA-ISN members have actively participated in these country activities.

Regional Influenza Awareness Activities/ Campaigns

Algeria

MoH officially launched the 2015-2016 season with the Algerian flu surveillance network (RASG) on October 11th, 2015 at the National Institute of Public Health.

The surveillance network included 100 GPs from private and public sectors and all were present at the meeting.



During this meeting MENA-ISN members, Dr. Hannoun and Dr. Derrar who are also the coordinators of the surveillance network presented the results of the 2014-2015 season and highlighted the objectives for the 2015-2016 season. They also talked about the change made in patient information forms where patients are asked whether they have diabetes and asthma as underlying disease. For this season in addition to the sentinel surveillance, hospital

based surveillance will also be conducted in Algeria.

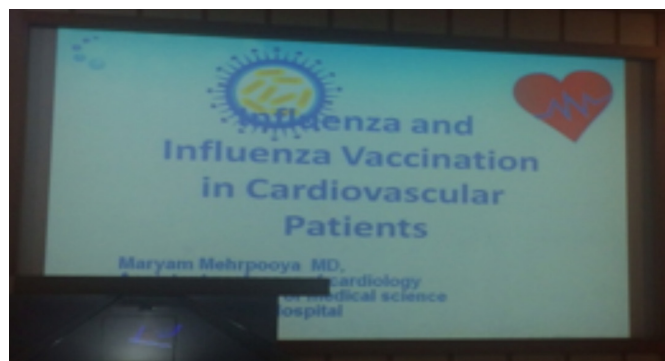


Iran

An influenza awareness session was included in the "Atherosclerosis Congress" that was held in Tehran, from 22 to 25 September, 2015. The purpose of this session was to increase influenza awareness among cardiologists. MENA-ISN member Dr. Ghasemi chaired the panel session on influenza vaccination where two speakers, Dr. Mehrpooya, cardiologist and Dr. Entekhabi, infectious disease specialist,

presented the importance of vaccination in patients with cardiovascular diseases.

During the workshop Dr. Ghasemi mentioned about his visit to WHO headquarters in Geneva and he asked HCPs to vaccinate all of their patients with cardiovascular diseases during the flu season. At the end of the session Dr. Ghasemi and Dr. Eslami received their influenza vaccine shot in front of the audience.



Another meeting, National Corona and Influenza Symposium, organized by Center of Infectious and Tropical Diseases Research Department of Shahid Beheshti Medical University lead by MENA-ISN member Dr. Mardani's team in collaboration with Iranian CDC on November 3, 2015, Tehran. Two Iranian Influenza Stakeholder Network (IPWI) members, Dr. Nabavi from national CDC and Dr. Moktari from National Influenza Lab, were the collaborators of this meeting from national CDC. Majority of the participants were from infection control units of

hospitals in Tehran, as well as some infectious disease specialists, Dr. Mardani, Dr. Yadegari and Dr. Shokoohi.

During the meeting influenza speakers focused on the importance of vaccination and current coverage rate in Iran. They also talked about the flu season in Iran, flu waves, and time of vaccination. Dr. Tabatabaei talked about the flu vaccines and differences between the vaccines, where she mentioned about the advantages of split vaccines versus subunit vaccines based on current available data.



The meeting was followed by a panel discussion where participants found answers to their questions regarding vaccination and the timing of vaccination.

The symposium was covered by Health Department of National TV and they held

interviews with KOLs, broadcasted during the health news from national TV.

In addition, during a pediatric congress in Iran, MENA-ISON member Dr. Esteghamati, gave a talk on influenza vaccination and epidemiological data on influenza.



KSA

Within the context of "National Influenza Vaccination Programme", the flu campaign led by the MoH started on October 15, 2015 to increase the awareness among the lay public and HCPs. The MoH has added young children 6 months to 5 years old to the risk groups

as recommended by WHO. For 2015-2016 season, MoH is targeting to use 1.5 million doses of vaccines to vaccinate the:

- Young children 6m - 5y
- Patients with chronic diseases
- Pregnant women
- HCWs



The awareness activities by MoH included:

- Series of educational meetings for HCPs
- Awareness activities in the shopping malls with vaccination on spot
- Awareness activities in the airports
- Awareness campaign on the social media account of MOH
- Sending WhatsApp messages
- Advertisements in the newspapers, in the screen of ATMs, in the screens of Saudi Airlines planes, in the scientific magazines in KSA
- Distribution of awareness materials in the districts
- DTC materials inside the Hospitals & PHCs



Libya

Libyan Advisory Committee on Influenza Control (LACIC)' has been established in July, 2015 by Professor Suleiman Abusrewil, Chairman of the NCDC and MENA-ISON member. LACIC includes two respiratory physicians, a GP, a primary health care physician, a laparotomy technician, a pediatrician, an epidemiologist and the surveillance unit to start national influenza surveillance in Libya.





Turkey

With the MoH approval support from local health authorities, MENA-ISON member and president of Turkish Internal Medicine Association (TIHUD), Prof. Dr. Serhat Ünal has organized six flu trainings involving family physicians in 5 provinces in Turkey. The aim of the campaign was to increase awareness among the family physicians to increase vaccination rate among the risk groups. Family physicians were reminded that, they can start vaccination in October and continue vaccinating through the season which ends in Turkey at the end of April. At the end of the campaign TIHUD in collaboration with MoH will compare the vaccination rate with rates from last year to assess if the campaign helped in increasing the vaccination coverage rate.

In addition, TIHUD will organize influenza and adult vaccination “train the trainer” session for internists throughout Turkey on 16th of November, 2015.

Dr. Ünal also held meetings with the pharmacists to increase awareness on vaccination timing among the pharmacies.



Egypt

Egypt is one of those countries where several actions are taken for fight against influenza.

1- Influenza and Diabetes Advisory Board Meeting

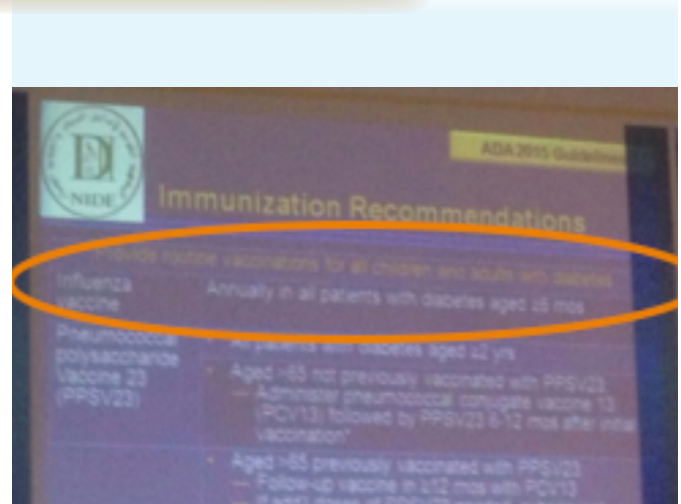
One of those activities was the meeting of national “Influenza and Diabetes Advisory Board” that was held in Cairo, August 10th, 2015. The meeting was attended by eminent diabetologists from Egypt including Dr. ElHefnawy, MENA-ISON member and the dean of National Diabetes Institute. The main conclusion of the meeting was

that awareness and education of HCPs, remain the key to drive-support patient awareness activities. The board developed a scientific slide kit about Influenza burden in diabetic patients and vaccine recommendation to be presented in local diabetes congresses.

2- Educational Program for Diabetes Management

The programme was held in Menofia Delta, Egypt on 15 Oct. 2015. Prof. H. ElHefnawy especially focused on the recommendation of annual Influenza vaccination for all patients with diabetes aged

> 6 months as recommended by ADA 2015.



3- Dia-Egypt Congress

Held in Alexandria on 21 - 23 October, 2015

Prof. M. Khattab, Professor of Internal Medicine Cairo University and National Advisory Board member presented Influenza burden and vaccine recommendations in influenza scientific symposium session of the congress. He stressed on the importance of influenza vaccine in diabetics as recommended by international health authorities and societies such as WHO, CDC and ADA.



4- Meeting of Modern Egyptian Society of Internists (MESI)

The meeting was held in Alexandria, Egypt in 15 - 16 Oct. 2015

The Influenza symposium was organized on Thursday 15 October, 2015 during Annual Summer Meeting of Modern Egyptian Society of Internists (MESI) in Alexandria. Prof. H. Tarraf, Professor of Internal Medicine Cairo University and MENA-ISON member and Dr. Meral Akcay, Sanofi Pasteur MENA Flu/Dengue Disease Expert gave talks on influenza virology, disease burden and vaccine recommendations by WHO.

The session was followed by questions and answers session with a fruitful discussion about influenza vaccine and importance of vaccination in high risk groups.

In addition to activities listed above, in partnership with the National Vaccination Institute (Vacsera), a public awareness campaign in public gatherings such as malls, social clubs, companies has been started for Influenza disease awareness; elaborating the risk of influenza and disease burden especially among high risk groups.



Influenza News

WHO Influenza Update

http://www.who.int/influenza/surveillance_monitoring/updates/latest_update_GIP_surveillance/en/

Summary

Globally, influenza activity generally decreased or remained low in both hemispheres, with only a few countries reporting elevated **respiratory illness** levels. In the Northern Hemisphere, influenza activity continued at low, **inter-seasonal levels** with sporadic detections.

- Few influenza virus detections were reported by countries in Africa.
- Iran reported increased influenza detections, **mostly due to influenza A(H3N2)**.
- The WHO GISRS laboratories detected 1431 influenza viruses, of which 1140 (79.7%) were typed as influenza A and 291 (20.3%) as influenza B. Of the sub-typed influenza A viruses, 375 (46.2%) were influenza A(H1N1)pdm09 and 437 (53.8%) were influenza A(H3N2). Of the characterized B viruses, 61 (72.6%) belonged to the B-Yamagata lineage and 23 (27.4%) to the B-Victoria lineage

CDC Influenza Update

<http://www.cdc.gov/flu/weekly/>

During week 42 (October 18-24, 2015), influenza activity was low in the United States.

- Viral Surveillance: The most frequently identified influenza virus type reported by public health laboratories in week 42 was influenza A viruses, with influenza A (H3) viruses predominating. The percentage of respiratory specimens testing positive for influenza in clinical laboratories is low.

According to preliminary data by WHO and CDC, A(H3N2) viruses might dominate the season. However, we will need to wait for country specific data when it becomes available during the start of the epidemics most likely around week 48.
