Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control: Global Health Security Fact Sheet

The Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project (2019–2027), a global project funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), provides strategic technical assistance and direct service delivery to achieve HIV epidemic control among key and priority populations and strengthen global health security (GHS), including COVID-19 response. Led by FHI 360 with core partners Population Services International (PSI), Palladium, and Right to Care, EpiC delivers excellence in both HIV and GHS by bolstering health systems — especially at the primary health care level — that serve as the frontline of routine health care service delivery, and as the first point of contact for prevention, detection, and response activities.

The emergence of new pathogens and reemergence of existing pathogens and antimicrobial resistance (AMR) have been on the rise for decades (for example Ebola Virus Disease, Zika, MERS, Avian Influenza). EpiC's GHS programs are designed to strengthen capacities at national, subnational, and community levels in the face of increasingly complex infectious disease outbreaks. The unprecedented impact of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on populations both infected with and affected by the virus highlights the urgent need to invest in and coordinate strategies that prevent, detect, and respond to emerging infectious disease threats.

EPIC IMPLEMENTS GHS PROGRAMMING IN

19 countries:

Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Georgia, Ghana, Guinea, Honduras, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Mali, Moldova, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Tajikistan, Thailand, and Vietnam.

EpiC provides technical assistance to strengthen the capacity of health systems to mitigate the spread and impact of these public health emergencies. The project offers technical assistance (TA) to partner countries as they progress toward achieving GHS targets, informed by evaluations such as the Joint External Evaluation (JEE) and the International Health Regulations' (IHR) State Party Self-Assessment Annual Reporting Tool (SPAR). The project's TA aligns with national GHS priorities, National Action Plan for Health Security (NAPHS) processes, and USAID's goals.

EpiC is working to create sustainable impact in the face of these global public health crises by partnering with government ministries (including Ministry of Health [MOH], Ministry of Agriculture [MOA], and Ministry of Education) and a multisectoral *One Health* workforce (which includes human and animal health workers, primary care and community settings, laboratory technicians, veterinary professionals, epidemiologists, and bioinformaticians).

EpiC's Global Health Security Portfolio

EpiC provides technical assistance to strengthen country capacity for outbreak and public health emergency prevention, detection, and response. Through bilateral partnerships and coordination with other health programs, EpiC contributes to country ownership and a whole-of-government approach to addressing infectious disease threats. EpiC incorporates equity and social inclusion considerations in its GHS programming to reduce public health risks and adverse health effects, aligning with the US Government Health Security Strategy 2024. Illustrative examples of EpiC's targeted TA follow:

PREVENT
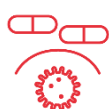
Antimicrobial resistance

EpiC El Salvador is applying an integrated package of activities to address the threat of AMR in the country, spanning human, animal, agricultural, food and environmental aspects (i.e., a One Health approach). EpiC is conducting a rapid assessment of the status of AMR interventions and capacity at the national level, including existing AMR guidelines and tools. The project collaborates with the government to develop a roadmap to draft a national antibiotic policy and treatment guidelines. Grounded in the One Health Approach, EpiC will support the MOH and Ministry of Agriculture to update the national AMR plan and promote a harmonized approach for monitoring and surveillance of antimicrobial drug use.

Biosafety and biosecurity

Recent situational analyses in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) revealed gaps in biosafety and security (BSS) capacity. **EpiC DRC** is working with the MOH to design, disseminate, and implement integrated infectious diseases biosafety and security (BSS) measures at provincial laboratories. EpiC is developing a capacity building package, including BSS training material and biorisk management SOPs for AMR and priority zoonotic pathogens. To prepare a One Health workforce, EpiC will roll out the BSS training for environmental, animal, and human health staff.

Zoonotic diseases and One Health

Despite efforts by Ghana Health Service (GHS) and Veterinary Services Directorate (VSD) to improve zoonotic disease detection and response, Ghana faces several challenges including weak data systems, lack of guidelines, and insufficiently resourced human and animal health laboratories. To address these gaps, **EpiC Ghana** is providing a package of technical assistance (TA) to sustainably improve systems and increase human resource capacity to detect, respond to, control, and prevent zoonoses. A major focus will be to integrate data collection, analysis, interpretation, and use across the human, animal, and environmental health sectors. The project will develop a cadre of master trainers to cascade One Health trainings to districts and communities.

DETECT

National Laboratory Systems

The JEE highlighted gaps in the organization and functionality of Kyrgyzstan's specimen referral and transport systems. **EpiC Kyrgyzstan** is supporting the MOH and MOA to conduct a diagnostic network assessment of policies and guidelines, laboratory infrastructure, and use of diagnostic technologies. The assessment is designed to identify areas for improvement according to core capacity areas identified by international standards. EpiC is also undertaking a diagnostic network optimization (DNO) activity to identify placement and function of laboratory equipment, needs for diagnostic services by location and type, and qualified diagnostic human resources available by location. EpiC will geospatially analyze the results and develop DNO scenarios including a costed maintenance plan for a specimen referral system using the most efficient transportation routes.

Human Resources/One Health Workforce Development and Management

Despite central efforts to advance the One Health approach in Vietnam, provincial departments have limited understanding of their workforce and health information system needs, and the technical capacity to ensure health security. In response, **EpiC Vietnam** is working with Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) authorities, including the HCMC Department of Health, the HCMC Center for Disease Control, and representatives from the Departments of Agriculture and Rural Development and Natural Resources and Environment to improve the province's ability to detect, prevent, and respond to emerging infectious diseases. The project is co-facilitating a comprehensive assessment to explore gaps in human resource and laboratory capacity and the extent to which health information systems are effectively integrated and functional across human and animal sectors. Results from the assessment will inform recommendations for the development of a provincially-led One Health approach.

Surveillance

In Ghana, community participation in event-based surveillance (EBS) and cross-sector collaboration in monitoring and responding to health threats is lacking. **EpiC Ghana** will address these gaps and strengthen EBS of animal and human events through a combination of approaches. Strategies include capacity building of community volunteers for data collection, reporting, and monitoring, as well as strengthening collaboration between public and private sector actors across human, animal, and environmental health sectors.

Round 2 antimicrobial surveillance in Da Nang, Vietnam. Photo by Fleming Fund, implemented by FHI 360 Vietnam

RESPOND

Health emergency management

In response to recent infectious disease outbreaks in neighboring countries, Senegal created an emergency operations center (EOC) that can be activated during emergencies. However, due to lack of funding, the EOC cannot be activated in a timely manner. To strengthen the EOC's capacity for health emergency management and response, **EpiC Senegal** will provide surge support during outbreaks of national or international concern, including providing needed infection prevention and control

Infection prevention and control

To address gaps related to monitoring of infection prevention and control (IPC) programs and increase Tajikistan's JEE score on IPC, **EpiC Tajikistan** is applying multimodal strategies to support 25 facilities to meet WHO IPC requirements, including providing personal protective equipment (PPE), antiseptics, soap, and other supplies; conducting assessments, trainings, mentorships, and on-the-job capacity strengthening; and ensuring the availability of IPC information, education, and communication materials. To ensure sustainability of its activities, the project is setting up a resource center on IPC within the state education institution (Institute of Postgraduate Education in the field of Health of the Republic of Tajikistan) equipped with information technology equipment, PPE for practical sessions, and study materials.

Risk communication and community engagement

EpiC's risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) work uses a socio-ecological lens to view the complex interplay among individual, interpersonal, community, and societal factors that affect behaviors. Building on a strong history of implementing USAID social and behavioral change (SBC) programming, **EpiC Kyrgyzstan** will identify and increase preventive practices to create demand for products and services, counter misinformation, address vaccine hesitancy, create an enabling environment, reduce stigma, strengthen community surveillance and reporting, generate individual and collective action, and support frontline responders. To address gaps identified by the JEE, EpiC is supporting the Kyrgyz Government to develop a National Multisectoral Multi-Hazard One Health RCCE - Infodemic Management (RCCE-IM) strategy.

Public health response at point of entry

In Honduras, a public health emergency operation center (PHEOC) was hastily structured for COVID-19 response, and the public health emergency management system is not regularly tested. Routine simulation exercises are not conducted, and surge staffing capacity during health emergencies is lacking. To address these gaps, **EpiC Honduras** is conducting a cross-border avian flu outbreak simulation exercise involving points of entry with Guatemala or El Salvador. Epic will synthesize lessons learned through this exercise and disseminate them in a learning event with One Health stakeholders in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.