

## **International technical consultation “Cities and Public Health Crises”**

### **Background**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was marked by a rapid spread of urbanization and population growth. The global percentage of the urban population increased from 13% in 1900 to 49% in 2005. According to UN estimates, 4.9 billion people will be living in urban settings in 2030.

The phenomenon of urban growth is at the root of specific problems that affect city dwellers, such as housing, transportation, security and health. Poorly managed urbanization can lead to the deterioration of sanitary conditions, to an uncontrollable overcrowding that favours the spread of disease. Moreover, little by little globalization “erases” geographic boundaries and furthers population displacement. Since 1990, the number of passengers travelling internationally by airplane each year has increased from 169 million to 330 million (World Tourism Organization statistics for 2004). Passengers who are ill or in the incubation phase of an illness can spread diseases on a vast scale within a matter of hours, particularly in large cities.

Urbanization has thus become one of the factors that cause the spread of diseases in today’s world. From HIV to Ebola, over 30 new pathogens have appeared over the last decades. Furthermore, diseases that were once contained have made a comeback. These diseases often carry heavy human, social and economic losses. For example, it is estimated that the emergence of SARS in 2003, which led to the death of nearly 800 people, cost the global economy 60 billion dollars. Other examples include natural disasters and industrial accidents (such as flooding, cyclones, nuclear and chemical accidents). The management of such events, which are rarely anticipated, present a daunting challenge for local authorities.

In the face of these challenges, the World Health Organization<sup>1</sup> adopted a revised version of the International Health Regulations in 2005, which lays out the rules for the international management of these public health risks. The revised Regulations, which came into force on 15 June 2007, constitute a significant improvement for the management of international public health risks of international concern, which increasingly have an impact on large urban areas.

This situation calls for the development of new approaches for the response to public health emergencies in urban settings. Lyon and its Region<sup>2</sup>, its history, its vaccine and diagnostics industry, its research and academic contribution in the fields of biotechnology, medicine and veterinary science, its high security laboratory and the presence of a WHO office since 2001 that is dedicated to international public health security<sup>3</sup>, offer a unique venue to highlight and raise awareness of this issue.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.who.int/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/en/index.html)

<sup>2</sup> [www.grandlyon.com](http://www.grandlyon.com); [www.rhone.fr](http://www.rhone.fr); [www.rhonealpes.fr](http://www.rhonealpes.fr)

<sup>3</sup> [www.who.int/ihr/lyon](http://www.who.int/ihr/lyon)

## **The project**

Eager to develop an initiative on the increasingly important theme of response to public health emergencies in urban settings, Lyonbiopôle<sup>4</sup>, in partnership with WHO and the Grand Lyon, are co-organizing an international technical consultation on this increasingly important subject.

WHO has been invited to co-sponsor this event by:

- contributing its technical expertise
- identifying international experts working in the fields of public health, epidemic and pandemic response and related fields such as communications and urban governance
- develop the meeting agenda.

### ***Objectives***

To launch the debate on response to public health emergencies in urban settings, particularly in the fields of technology, sociology and security, via:

- exchange of concrete experiences;
- debates between relevant experts and actors;
- building intersectoral and international partnerships;
- raising awareness among the media and general public.

### ***Participants***

About 50 international technical experts from the fields of health, urban governance, safety, transport and communications are invited to participate in the consultation.

### ***Dates and venue***

29-30 October 2008 on the premises of the WHO Lyon Office

### ***Methodology***

- Duration: 2 days
  
- Group discussions on the following three themes:
  - i. “The respective roles of municipal and national authorities in the management of a public health emergency, also addressing business continuity”*
  
  - ii. “Technical management of public health emergencies in urban settings”*
  
  - iii “Communications, social mobilization and the role of the media during a public health emergency in urban settings”*

Each group discussion will be introduced and facilitated by a leading expert.

- invitation of local/national media
- communications campaign

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<sup>4</sup> [www.lyonbiopole.org/](http://www.lyonbiopole.org/)

***Expected outcomes***

The topics addressed during this meeting will serve as the basis for the BioVision 2009 conference (Life in the City: Managing urban epidemics<sup>5</sup>).

The conclusions that emanate from the pre-conference on 29-30 October and the BioVision event will lead to the development and dissemination of recommendations/technical guidance on response to public health emergencies in urban settings, particularly in the fields of technology, sociology and security. This publication would target all actors concerned, and would be tailored to the needs at both national and local levels.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.biovision.org/>