

MECIDS Past, Present, and Future:

MECIDS and its contribution along the years as a pragmatic platform of collaboration between health professionals from the ministries of health and academia in Jordan, Palestinian Authority and Israel to enhance surveillance and response to infectious diseases of regional and global importance. Initially focused on enhancing foodborne disease surveillance (e.g. salmonellosis), MECIDS has expanded the scope of its work to also include avian and pandemic influenza, Middle-East Corona Virus Respiratory Syndrome (MERS CoV) and vector-borne diseases such as West Nile Fever and leishmaniasis. Collaboration through MECIDS, sustainable even during times of political dispute and outbreaks of violence, includes data sharing, design and implementation of joint surveillance protocols and development of rapid response strategies to public health emergencies with cross-border emphasis and under the principles of WHO International Health Regulations (IHR). To enhance the surveillance activities and for capacity building, MECIDS has held throughout the years numerous training cycles, workshops and courses with focus on infectious diseases prevention and control, field epidemiology, laboratory methods and Public Health laboratory Biosafety and Biosecurity.

The experience accumulated from previously addressed emerging events can be used by MECIDS to offer means of communication and collaboration among its partners (Israel, Palestinian Authority and Jordan) when dealing today with the threat of the novel corona virus pandemic transmission. Also, MECIDS is currently actively involved in a Fleming Fund supported project to enhance surveillance of antimicrobial use and antimicrobial resistance in African countries.

Under the current conditions, MECIDS capabilities and important potential contributions, An adequate financial support will be needed to make the MECIDS platform better respond to the COVID 19 epidemic

MECIDS in Brief:

The Middle East Consortium for Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS) was established in 2003 by health professionals from the Ministries of Health and academia of Jordan, Palestinian Authority and Israel to fulfill the goal of facilitating trans-border cooperation in response to disease outbreaks

- **Instrumental platform of collaboration addressing regional emerging infectious diseases**
 - *H5N1 avian flu (2005)*
 - *H1N1 pandemic influenza (2009)*
 - *transmission of foodborne diseases (e.g. salmonellosis)*
 - *transmission of vector-borne diseases (eg. West Nile Fever and leishmaniasis)*
 - *MERS-CoV*
 - *COVID 19*

- **When Israel on the one hand, and Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, on the other, belong to different WHO administrative regions – MECIDS emerged as a unique mechanism for cross-border collaboration.**
 - *Shared data and analyses*
 - *Harmonized infectious disease diagnostic and reporting methodologies*
 - *Joint trainings in field epidemiology with regional and/or World Health Organization trainers*
 - *Facilitated cross-border training and communication among laboratory technicians*
 - Establishment of protocols for investigation of disease outbreaks
 - Development of rapid response strategies

- **COVID-19: Proposed MECIDS activities**
 - Convene MECIDS meetings through webinar platforms with Jordanian, Israeli and Palestinian public health officials and experts in order to plan:
 - *Information exchange; data and analysis on each country's response to the COVID-19 outbreak*
 - *Update and harmonise case definitions, diagnostic and reporting methodologies*
 - *Develop rapid response strategies*
 - *Share information about laboratory procedures to accurately and rapidly detect the novel epidemic coronavirus and support joint training sessions*
 - *Discuss methodologies involving quarantining*
 - *Discuss prevention campaigns and future webinars*
 - *Training and Education through Webinars and face to face (when possible)*
 - *Update on level of morbidity and mortality*
 - *Surveillance methods*
 - *Clinical management of COVID 19 cases*
 - *Infection control*
 - *Sampling and testing strategies*
 - Launch a public education and prevention campaign, which provide accurate information on COVID-19 to the Palestinian, Jordanian and Israeli populations
 - Hold face to face meetings for MECIDS Executive Board in Jerusalem or out of the Middle East if situation permits

- Set up future training with regional and/or World Health Organisation trainers in treatment and Laboratory techniques
- Performance of serosurveys to assess the extent of exposure and potential generation of natural immunity to COVID 19 with special emphasis on high risk groups and first responders (e.g. health care workers).

- **MECIDS: Scientific Publications**

- *Sheikh A., Abdul-Hai A, Ramlawi A, Abdeen Z, Haddadin A, Bassal R, Al-Abdallat², Sultan Abdallat MM, Alqaseer B, Dichtiar D, Glatman-Freedman A, Shohat T, Cohen D. Seroepidemiological study to identify Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Corona Virus (MERS-coV) transmission in Jordan, Israel and Palestinian Authority, Prince Mahidol Award Conference, January 29-30 2018, Bangkok, Thailand*
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- *Cohen D, Gargouri N, Ramlawi A, Abdeen Z, Belbesi A, Al Hijawi B, Haddadin A, Sheikh Ali S, Al Shuaibi N, Bassal R, Yishai R, Green MS, Leventhal A. A Middle East subregional laboratory-based surveillance network on foodborne diseases established by Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Authority. *Epidemiol Infect.* 2010;138(10):1443-8.*
- *Leventhal A, Ramlawi A, Belbiesi A, Sheikh S, Haddadin A, Husseini S, Abdeen Z, Cohen D. Enhanced surveillance for detection and management of infectious diseases: regional collaboration in the Middle East. *Emerg Health Threats J.* 2013;6.*
- *Leventhal A, Ramlawi A, Belbiesi A, Balicer D. R. Regional collaboration in the Middle East to deal with H5N1 avian flu. *BMJ.* 2006;333:8568.*

In Addition to all these activities, MECIDS continues to promote positive relations on the human level among cross-border, public health officials even at times when there is a huge amount of conflict in the region.