

Media Update

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United Nations

PRESS RELEASE

The UN is committed and on ground to support HIV response in Pakistan

Islamabad, Pakistan, 18 June 2019 — The two-week WHO-led joint UN investigation into the HIV outbreak in Larkana district of Sindh, has concluded and preliminary results reveal that the major cause of the outbreak is the repeated use of unclean needles and syringes and unsafe blood transfusion. Children less than 15 years old were mainly infected.

At a debriefing held recently in Karachi, the Federal Minister of State for National Health Services, Regulation and Coordination, Dr Zafar Mirza and the Health Minister Sindh, Dr Azra Fazal Pechuho, acknowledged the need to strengthen public health system to ensure that similar outbreaks do not occur in the future. Or if ever, the country has resources and systems in place to address it effectively.

According to Mr. Neil Buhne, UN Resident Coordinator, *“the UN in Pakistan remains committed to assist the Federal and Provincial Governments in responding to the outbreak, and to helping the Government prevent the spread of HIV by strengthening health systems throughout Pakistan. UN Pakistan through the presence of 11 UNAIDS Co-sponsors and its Secretariat, has committed and qualified staff on the ground and is already supporting the Government in accelerating its HIV response.”* The Co-sponsors are UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN WOMEN, ILO, UNESCO, WHO, and the World Bank.

Preliminary community rapid assessment conducted during the outbreak showed that there is lack of knowledge in terms of transmission and prevention. The findings also revealed the presence of immense stigma towards individuals and families with HIV positive children. Stigma can be crippling for those experiencing it. Part of the response will be to address this issue and making sure those infected and affected are supported.



Meanwhile, the draft “Sindh HIV Outbreak Response Plan” will be further refined to ensure that the recommendations from the outbreak investigation, both short-term and long-term, are addressed. Upon the request of the Sindh AIDS Control Program, UNICEF and UNAIDS are now assisting in costing the Response Plan. This will be used in coordinating various multi-partner activities and in mobilizing resources both domestically and internationally.

Furthermore, UNICEF, UNAIDS, UNFPA and WHO in collaboration with other partners will support Sindh AIDS Control Programme to implement the “Community Response Plan”, an important element of the Sindh HIV Outbreak Response Plan. Consultations with community members to address issues related to HIV education, stigma, discrimination and rejection, gender-based violence, psycho-social support, access to prevention services, HIV testing services including pre- and post-test counselling to reduce loss to follow-up and enhance adherence to life-saving, lifelong treatment, were carried out.

HIV is a complex issue. It touches upon several dimensions including health, education, cultural practices and social milieu. If left unchecked, more young people will be infected and the country’s workforce will be weakened. Hence, the long-term impact on social and economic development could be potentially substantial.

It is imperative that risk factors of HIV infection are addressed ensuring that communities have access to comprehensive prevention, treatment, care and support services to will help the country achieve the Sustainable Development Goal, particularly the target on ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.

The United Nations in Pakistan, therefore, calls upon policy makers, religious leaders and community leaders to make sure that the rights of those infected and affected are protected.

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