

Meeting of the Parties to the Protocol on  
Water and Health to the Convention on  
the Protection and Use of Transboundary  
Watercourses and International Lakes

Eleventh meeting  
Geneva, 3 and 4 April 2019  
Item 5 of the provisional agenda  
**Prevention and reduction of water-related diseases**

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**Brief summary of the national workshop on water-related disease surveillance  
and outbreak response in Azerbaijan (Baku, 9-11 October 2018)**

*Background and purpose*

Establishing national targets for maintaining a high level of protection against water-related disease is a core provision of the Protocol on Water and Health.

The Protocol stipulates to establish, improve and maintain comprehensive surveillance and early warning systems for water-related disease, and to ensure contingency planning and outbreak response capacities. Parties to the Protocol are further required to establish and maintain a legal and institutional framework for monitoring and enforcing standards for the quality of drinking-water.

Azerbaijan is a Party to the Protocol since 2003 and has set national targets, which were adopted in August 2018. The targets were set in support to implementing Sustainable Development Goals 3 and 6, as well as the Ostrava Declaration on Environment and Health in the area of water, sanitation and hygiene.

The objective of the workshop was to support implementation of newly adopted national targets and to improve capacities on effective approaches to surveillance of drinking-water supply and of water-related disease, based on internationally recognized good practices and in accordance to the provisions of the Protocol.

*Attendance and venue*

The workshop took place in Baku from 9-11 October 2018 and was hosted by the Republican Hygiene and Epidemiology Centre (RHEC) under the Ministry of Health. It was attended by about 35 participants from the Ministry of Health, RHEC and its district offices, the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources, and academia. The workshop was technically supported by three experts from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health and the staff from the WHO European Centre for Environment and Health. Mr Vagif Abdullayev and Ms Afag Alieva, Deputy Directors, REHC, co-chaired the technical sessions of the workshop.

*Outcomes*

The training improved knowledge of the communal hygienists and epidemiologists on drinking-water quality and water-related disease surveillance, understanding of good practices in outbreak response and associated risk communication, and methods of epidemiological investigation of waterborne outbreaks. The participants appreciated the usefulness of the table-top exercises on waterborne outbreak management and epidemiological investigation of outbreaks, including hands-on exercises on the application of the statistical tool EpiInfo 7.

### *Conclusions*

The participants discussed and identified the following main strengths and key challenges of surveillance of drinking-water quality and water-related diseases, as well as actions towards improvement.

*Main strengths.* Rapid, sensitive and timely detection and response systems to public health events are in place thanks to the introduction of a electronic notification and reporting system of infectious diseases; adequate access to drinking-water supply services; surveillance agencies and water utilities are well equipped with the laboratories for drinking-water quality monitoring; and there is effective cooperation and communication between different stakeholders, including water utilities and the Ministry of Emergency, which leads emergency management.

*Main challenges and needs.* Outdated national standards for drinking-water quality; lack of a full picture of the situation of water supply across the country and the need to conduct a systematic assessment at national level that would inform appreciation of the actual situation, gaps and improvement priorities; improve the use of the electronic notification and reporting system at the regional level; improve capacities of personnel in regional labs and maintain provision of logistics, in particular in remote rural areas; improve capacity on risk assessment and risk management approaches for water supplies and analysis of emerging hazards (e.g. legionella); and further improve coordination between the stakeholders, in particular between the water utilities and public health agencies.

*Recommended actions* can be summarized in three main areas:

1. Strengthen regulatory environment on water safety and quality:
  - Update the national standard on drinking-water quality, taking into consideration international practices, in particular the WHO Guidelines for drinking-water quality and EU drinking-water requirements;
  - Familiarize with WHO-recommended sanitary inspection forms and the methodology for the rapid assessment of drinking-water quality, including review of the feasibility of application of these tools in the context of Azerbaijan.
2. Capacity building on risk-based surveillance of drinking-water quality and water-related disease surveillance and outbreak management:
  - Conduct trainings and build capacity of the Regional Hygiene and Epidemiology Centres on the use of the electronic notification and reporting system of infectious diseases, which is currently introduced at the central administrative level, and scale-up implementation across the country;
  - Establish a systematic training programme and organize targeted individual and/or joint trainings for water utilities and public health centres on risk assessment and risk management of water supplies and surveillance of drinking-water quality, including the selection of core monitoring parameters;
  - Learn from real-life outbreak experiences and continue to undertake post-outbreak or post event assessment to review achievements, gaps and needed improvements.
3. Intensify partnership and stakeholder cooperation:

- Continue collaboration and mutual assistance with AZERSU Open Joint Stock Company through implementing the cooperation plan. Closely engage AZERSU in risk assessment and risk management activities;
- Develop a joint practical guidance by the Ministry of Health, RHEC and AZERSU to operationalize the water safety plan (WSP) implementation;
- Strengthen collaboration with WHO on water and health and include a dedicated task on water safety in the biennial collaborative agreement (BCA) for 2020-2021 between the Ministry of Health of Azerbaijan and WHO to support above proposed activities.