



**GOVERNMENT OF SIERRA LEONE
NATIONAL PUBLIC HEALTH AGENCY
(NPHA)**



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Enhance Disease Surveillance and Response: A Call to Action for a Stronger Sierra Leone

Introduction:

The devastating 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak, which claimed over 3,800 lives in Sierra Leone, exposed critical gaps in the country's public health preparedness. However, this tragedy also served as a testament to Sierra Leone's resilience and determination. Since then, Sierra Leone has significantly strengthened its disease surveillance system, with dedicated support from partners like the World Health Organization (WHO) and the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC).

Key Achievements:

- Over 300 public health officers have been trained in surveillance via the Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) Frontline, Intermediate, and Advanced programs, leading to a significant increase in the early detection of disease outbreaks.
- A well-equipped Emergency Operations Centre at the national level serves as the central hub for coordinating outbreak responses.
- Emergency and Outbreak Management Committees have been established at national and district levels.
- Electronic Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (e-IDSR) has been deployed in all 16 districts and all 1,567 public health facilities, enabling efficient data collection and real-time reporting.
- Weekly reporting rates of public health events from healthcare facilities have consistently surpassed 95%.
- Regular data analysis is conducted, and findings are disseminated through weekly bulletins.
- Risk communication mechanisms for epidemic-prone diseases empower communities to take preventative measures.
- Community Health Workers (CHWs) have been trained in Community-Based Surveillance (CBS) and incentivized to participate, strengthening the surveillance network at the grassroots level.
- The DHIS2 platform has been integrated with e-IDSR for improved data management.

Challenges and Proposed Solutions:

Strengthen Event-based Surveillance (EBS): Building on the success of our IDSR program, we will further enhance EBS by training staff on early warning and response using a One Health approach, which emphasizes collaboration across human, animal, and environmental health sectors. This will significantly improve our ability to detect and respond to disease outbreaks. Additionally, increased community engagement will improve the timeliness and accuracy of reported cases, leading to more effective control measures.



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Data Challenges: To address data challenges, we aim to:

- Enhance laboratory-surveillance data integration.
- Strengthen data management practices through targeted training for healthcare workers in data analysis.
- Improve interoperability between different data collection systems.

Resource Constraints: While the government is committed to strengthening disease surveillance, resource gaps remain that can be bridged through strategic partnerships. Optimizing existing resources through a comprehensive human resource strategy and improved logistics for supportive supervision will ensure efficient utilization of available funds. Exploring grant opportunities and public-private partnerships can further strengthen resource availability and provide a robust disease surveillance system.

Weak Intersectoral Coordination: Strengthening collaboration across ministries and implementing a One Health approach for early warning surveillance are crucial steps towards a more unified and effective response system.

Limited sentinel sites: Expanding the network of sentinel surveillance sites will allow for closer monitoring of priority diseases like influenza and other respiratory pathogens, as well as associated risk factors.

Investment and Impact:

The estimated cost of strengthening Sierra Leone's disease surveillance system is about 1.5 million USD. This investment will address critical gaps and ensure a robust disease surveillance system. The benefits include:

- Early outbreak detection leading to faster and more effective response measures.
- Data-driven decision-making for targeted interventions and resource allocation.
- A more comprehensive approach to disease prevention and control, ultimately saving lives and protecting public health.

Call to Action:

The National Public Health Agency (NPHA) calls for collective action and partnerships to strengthen Sierra Leone's health system and address future public health threats. By supporting the establishment of additional sentinel sites, investing in training programs for healthcare workers, and fostering collaboration across sectors, we can build a more resilient and responsive disease surveillance system for a healthier Sierra Leone.