

CDC Launches the Global Health Security Agenda

By Shannon Omisore, Technical/Writer Editor, CDC

CDC continues to help to protect the United States from public health threats, an ongoing priority that requires an international effort. On February 13, 2014, CDC helped launch the Global Health Security (GHS) Agenda in Washington, DC, and Geneva, Switzerland. “The GHS Agenda has high aims of making people around the world safer against the threat of infectious disease epidemics. The launch was a process of getting countries together—in this case 29 countries to jointly commit to accelerating progress toward the goal,” said Scott Dowell, MD, MPH (RADM, USPHS), CDC senior advisor for GHS.

With the ease of air travel, infectious diseases can spread rapidly. Previous outbreaks, such as the 2003 SARS outbreak and the 2009 H1N1 pandemic have compelled the United States to make GHS a priority. This year, CDC and the Department of Defense (DOD) are jointly programming \$40 million for the agenda, and the President’s Budget for FY 15 is requesting an additional \$45 million to be allocated to CDC for GHS. For example, under the GHS Agenda, nations would receive the necessary support to properly secure laboratories that contain potentially dangerous agents and reduce the threat of infectious diseases. The GHS Agenda will also help ministers of health for host countries to establish career paths and training for their public health employees to build a workforce that can protect their own citizens from the threat of infectious diseases.



With Uganda’s enhanced nationwide laboratory network, virus samples can be tested in country in days. *Photo by Justin Williams*

Prior to the launch, CDC led two demonstration projects in Uganda and Vietnam in 2013. This year, CDC is combining resources and expertise with the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA) to build on the success of last year’s demonstration projects by expanding the list of countries for GHS implementation in Ethiopia, Georgia, India, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania, and Thailand. The GHS Agenda is a CDC-wide effort involving the Center for Global Health (CGH), National Center for Infectious Diseases (NCIRD), National Center for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases (NCEZID), Office of Public Health Preparedness and Response (OPHPR), Center for Surveillance, Epidemiology, and Laboratory Services (CSELS), and other CIOs.



Eric Kasowski (CAPT, USPHS), branch chief of the Global Health Security Branch (CGH). *Photo by Jim Gathany*

“Ultimately, the Global Health Security Agenda is aimed at improving our ability worldwide to prevent, detect and respond to infectious disease outbreaks. The GHS Agenda is very compatible with the World Health Organization’s International Health Regulations 2005 capacities. Within CDC, the GHS Agenda is an agency-wide effort with implementation activities being coordinated by the Global Health Security Branch in CGH and involves every CIO in CDC,” said Eric Kasowski, DVM, MD, MPH (CAPT, USPHS), branch chief of the Global Health Security Branch, (CGH). “This larger governmental agenda brings together a lot of different departments—DOD, Department of State, USAID, which is part of the Department of State, USDA, and a lot of different agencies.”

The launch in February 2014 was part of an overall effort to develop the GHS Agenda, which is a five-year agenda that the United States and other partners such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations are committing to make a difference in public health around the world. The day of the launch, leaders from other federal agencies such as the Department of State, DOD, the Department of Agriculture (USDA), and ministries of health were in attendance, despite the snowy weather in Washington, DC.

All of the federal government and the buildings were closed, with the exception of the HHS Humphrey Building. “It was challenging. People really trudged through the snow to get there. We had to send, for example, a four-wheel drive vehicle to get the director general from Uganda to the launch. And then there were much fewer problems with weather in Geneva and robust participation there,” said Dowell.



The launch was part of an overall effort to develop the GHS Agenda. Pictured (l-r) are CDC Director Tom Frieden and HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.

With the launch of the GHS Agenda, the additional host countries will benefit from increased protection against infectious diseases and bioterrorism threats. “Part of the launch was to describe exactly what in concrete terms can be done to make people face against infectious disease epidemics. So the

experience from the Uganda and Vietnam demonstration projects—showing that in a short period of time, just seven months, that you really could strengthen nationwide laboratory systems and establish emergency operations centers was impressive to people and helped to galvanize support for this initiative,” said Dowell.



On February 13, 2014, CDC helped to launch the Global Health Security (GHS) in Washington, DC and Geneva.

The launch had the overall goal of garnering support and cooperation from host and partner countries for the GHS Agenda. Partner countries with resources are now being encouraged by the US federal government to help host countries meet global health regulations.

“The bigger part of the launch was to bring groups together and say, ‘What can we do to accelerate progress, especially in countries where there are existing commitments or there are existing resources? What can we do to better align those resources to make sure that we’re really having the impact that we think we need to be having?’” said Maureen Culbertson, MS, public health advisor (at the time of the launch, was on detail as deputy senior advisor for the GHS Agenda). “In general, the goal of the Global Health Security Agenda is to lay out specific measurable targets that allow countries to focus their existing work to protect their own populations and in doing that to better protect the health of the world.”

A few weeks after the launch, there was a GHS Conference at CDC in which domestic and international CDC staff discussed the agenda going forward. Just recently, Dowell and CDC Director Tom Frieden, MD, MPH, returned from Helsinki, where Finland held the first Commitment Development Meeting to drive progress following the launch of the agenda. More than 30 countries participated, and CDC will continue to work with those and other countries. “That’s really what is going to result in accelerating progress toward global health security. Getting commitment by countries in a short period of time to make a difference will be challenging, but at the end of the day, we’re only going to make the world safer against these infectious disease threads if many countries are able to contribute and play leadership roles,” said Dowell.



Lab worker in Vietnam. *Photo by Niki Pham*

CDC first communicates with host countries through the help of the Department of State, which sends a cable to each embassy requesting help in specific areas in getting the country's government and specifically, the ministry of health onboard for GHS. "Gone are the days of doing this on our own. We realize that no one agency can do all the capacity development that's needed out there, so we've got to partner with other agencies. We've got to have a willing embassy, ministry of health, and host national government in order to really make progress. So, we've got to set that stage first. Once that has been done and that host nation has said, 'Yeah, let's have a dialogue,' then we can set up a more technical discussion and determine what we are going to do and what's their timeline," said Kasowski.

The Global Health Security Branch in CGH then coordinates with subject-matter experts from throughout CDC and from CDC's in-country staff to help address priority areas for the host country. CDC staff working in the host country communicate with the ministry of health to determine the GHS-related needs of the country and then develop an implementation plan. "The other CIOs provide technical expertise for anti-microbial resistance and for whatever pathogens are most important to those countries. The idea is we've got to have an official conversation with these countries. This is what we're asking. And that is the stage we are at right now," said Kasowski.

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