

Directors of Clinical Services Meeting

Réunion des directeurs des services cliniques

INFECTION PREVENTION AND CONTROL – KEY REGIONAL ACTIVITIES

SUMMARY

A functional Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) program at the national and healthcare facility levels are critical for healthcare systems to mitigate Health-care-Associated Infections (HAIs) and contribute to the timely outbreak containment and prevent our healthcare facilities from becoming overwhelmed.

All Pacific Island Countries and Territories have an opportunity to strengthen IPC programs through the development or review of national IPC guidelines and workplans. Additionally, IPC programs have a central role in combating and reducing HAIs and Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) through HAI surveillance programs which is an important platform to identify problems and solutions to reduce infections, monitor and track HAI's before it becomes an outbreak, to monitor trends in disease outbreaks and to ensure compliance with IPC standards.

To strengthen HAI surveillance, SPC has embarked on a project to standardize Surgical Site Infection surveillance and a hand hygiene auditing package. The potential to improve IPC standards in the Pacific using the evidence from HAI surveillance data would be enormous as we move into the future.

1. BACKGROUND

Infectious disease epidemics and pandemics like COVID-19 will continue to increase posing major risks to Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs) health systems and may also have a profound effect on our ability to deliver safe quality healthcare. To address this risk, it is vital that our Pacific islands are supported to build Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) capacity, at the national and health care facility level to mitigate health-care-associated infections and contribute to the timely outbreak containment and prevent our healthcare facilities from becoming overwhelmed¹.

In May 2020, a needs assessment was carried out to identify priority needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey indicated IPC as one of the top priorities for training and capacity building, including the need to support updating of national IPC strategies, developing monitoring tools and provide capacity building to IPC national focal points. In summary, the survey highlighted the need to address the minimum requirements for building IPC capacity at national and healthcare facility levels.

2. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

2.1 IPC COVID-19 support - Pacific Joint Incident Management Team (JIMT)

To support the PICTs needs for COVID-19 preparations and response, the IPC cell under the Pacific JIMT provided over 10 technical guidance, PPE posters material and webinars on IPC related support within the context of COVID-19. SPC also produced two videos demonstrating how to safely put on and remove PPE. The video has been widely accessed by all PICTs and is now used in IPC training of PPE use.

To strengthen IPC visibility regionally, the 2021 Regional IPC guidelines was released on 21st September. The main objective of the Regional IPC guidelines is to provide guidance on IPC standards for Pacific Island countries to use as a framework to develop national and institutional guidelines. The guidelines are generic and can easily be adapted for use in the region.

Countries we have supported with national IPC guidelines, using the regional guideline as a template include Fiji, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu. In addition, national IPC workplans have been developed for Kiribati, Tonga and Vanuatu.

¹ World Health Organization, "Framework and Toolkit for Infection Prevention and Control in Outbreak Preparedness, Readiness and Response at the National Level," 2021. [Online]. Available: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/345251>. [Accessed 23rd September 2021]

2.2 Strengthening Healthcare Associated Infection Surveillance

Healthcare associated infections (HAIs) are a global burden and are the most common adverse events affecting both high income and low-income countries around the world wherever healthcare treatment services are provided. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2011) report highlights that HAI data from Low Middle Income countries are limited because surveillance systems including the lack of standardized surveillance structures are weak or do not exist².

HAI surveillance and hand hygiene audits are key functions of IPC teams and are considered a vital component of the IPC program activity. To support HAI surveillance, SPC has embarked on a project with technical assistance from the Doherty Institute to:

- standardize definitions and methodologies for conducting Surgical Site Infection surveillance for post-operative elective caesarean sections and the development of a hand hygiene training and auditing package.
- develop data collection tools to record SSI cases and compliance to hand hygiene.
- To develop HAI surveillance report templates

3. CHALLENGES

- Human Resource support for IPC
- Dedicated budgets for IPC program

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The *minimum requirements* for IPC will form the basis of moving forward. The World Health Organization framework for building IPC systems in all countries recommends at a minimum, at country level the implementation of the eight core components of IPC at the national and health care facility level³.

The achievement of all IPC core components takes time and each of the PICs may be at different levels of achieving these minimum requirements but it's important that we all work towards this

² World Health Organization, "Report on the burden of endemic health care-associated infection worldwide," 2011. [Online]. Available: <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/80135>. [Accessed 10 March 2021]

³ World Health Organization, "Minimum requirements for infection prevention and control programmes," 2019. [Online]. Available: <https://www.who.int/infection-prevention/publications/min-req-IPC-manual/en/>. [Accessed 01 June 2020].

achievement to strengthen the infrastructure for functioning IPC programmes that will also lead to reduction of HAIs, Anti-Microbial Resistance and our ability to respond to outbreaks.

4.1 Recommendations for governments:

- Continue to support IPC beyond COVID-19, Strengthen IPC programs at the national and healthcare facility level.
- Support the availability of national IPC guidelines sets the framework for rolling out IPC education and training, including IPC monitoring and evaluation.
- Support IPC education, it should be mandated for all health care workers.
- Support facility-based HAI surveillance to identify the most frequent HAIs and detect HAI outbreaks before they occur, including AMR surveillance

4.2 Recommendations for development partners:

- Support IPC programs in countries.