MECIDS (Middle East Consortium on Infectious Disease Surveillance):
Cross Border Surveillance and Response in the Middle East

"Surveillance Systems in Practice“
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Establishment of MECIDS 2003

Public health professionals from the Ministries of Health and academia of Jordan, Palestinian Authority and Israel, convened together by the USA based NGO (Search for Common Ground) formed the Middle East Consortium for Infectious Disease Surveillance (MECIDS)
The initial basis for the endeavour was the notion that in the Middle East, Public Health (especially infectious diseases) has tremendous potential to serve as common ground for cooperation between nations in dispute.
The Middle East

Two WHO Regions

WHO EURO

WHO EMRO
Mission by consensus

To facilitate cross-border cooperation in response to food-borne disease outbreaks - a common public health issue in the Middle East by:

• Choosing Salmonellosis and Shigellosis as target diseases

• Selection of a regional data analysis unit within the Cooperative Monitoring Center (CMC) Amman, Jordan

• Establishing a mechanism for sharing data among the national surveillance systems.

The intergovernmental partnership became effective on many levels:

1. Harmonising diagnostic and reporting methodologies

2. Establishing common training programmes (capacity building =narrowing gaps between countries) for:

   ➢ Salmonella Identification Workshop for working with the same equipment and reagents (Becton-Dickinson and Company)-
   ➢ PFGE Training

   ➢ Training epidemiologists and public health workers in MEPIET -(Middle East Programme Intervention Epidemiology Training)
The intergovernmental partnership became effective on many levels (cont’):

3. Encouraging data sharing and analysis;

4. Improving detection and control of food-borne infectious diseases

5. Facilitating cross-border communication between laboratory technicians and public health officials

6. Private/public partnership
PHAD: Public Health Affinity Domain
Communication Among National Systems
Contribution of IBM
Follow the leader
Avian Flu in the ME

17/2/06 Avian Flu in Egypt
>500M birds are crossing the ME

Avian Flu in the ME 3/06
Regional collaboration in the Middle East to deal with H5N1 avian flu

Alex Leventhal, Assad Ramlawi, Adel Bebbes, Ran D Balicer

In 2005-6 Arab and Israeli collaboration contained outbreaks of avian flu in the Middle East. This initiative shows how building relationships through joint efforts creates an infrastructure for cross border collaboration during emergencies.

Recent emerging infectious diseases have changed the way that outbreaks are dealt with—from a mainly local approach to a regional and even global one. The importance of global collaboration orchestrated by the World Health Organization has been demonstrated during recent outbreaks of severe acute respiratory syndrome and avian flu.12

We describe an example of Arab and Israeli collaboration in the Middle East on a public health issue. Cooperation between Israeli, Jordanian, and Palestinian veterinary and public health services contained outbreaks of H5N1 avian flu. The measures taken enabled these countries to avoid human infection, increased public confidence, and reduced potential adverse outcomes of the outbreaks. This success shows how building professional and personal relationships through joint efforts for tackling common infectious diseases creates an infrastructure for cross border collaboration during emergencies.

Geopolitical circumstances in the Middle East

Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel border one another. The distance between the three capital cities is less than 80 km. Palestinians who live in all three countries have close family and commercial ties with each other. The citizens of these countries live as one "epidemiological family."10

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS

Rights, obligations, & procedures for WHO and States Parties.

Come into force on 15 June 2007 *

* A later date applies to States which have submitted reservations.
Summary points for controlling AI outbreak in poultry (Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel)

- **Coordinated cross country planning** helped mitigate a potential public health crisis due to multiple outbreaks of avian flu in an area of conflict.

- **Building professional and personal relationships** through joint efforts on preparedness creates an infrastructure for cross border collaboration during emergencies.

Summary points for controlling AI outbreak in poultry (Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, and Israel)

- **Sharing and harmonising individual countries’ preparedness plans** for pandemic and avian flu helped synchronise efforts during the Outbreaks.

- **Cross country cooperation of veterinary and public health services** helped contain outbreaks of avian flu in Israel, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority.

- **Extensive and uniform measures** taken to tackle the outbreaks across the borders enabled the countries to avoid human infection, increase public confidence, and reduce adverse outcomes of the outbreaks.
Training and Workshops related to Pandemic of Influenza - cont’
( grant of the World Bank - for AI)

- Risk communication workshop with WHO
- Israeli, Jordanian and Palestinian conducted National Table Top Exercises on Avian and Pandemic influenza during 2007-2008
- Draft MOU in a workshop concerning regional Pandemic of Influenza taking IHR into account
- Regional Table Top Exercises with Jordanians, Israelis and Palestinians, September 2008 in which the MOU on cooperation on IHR in case of pandemia was tested
  (in cooperation with WHO headquarters, WHO/Euro and WHO office for Palestine, the RAND corporation)

The leaders of MECIDS
In summary

MECIDS is a viable regional network that has far exceeded its set up goals and demonstrated great potential to expand its scope through inclusion of different communicable diseases and other countries of the region as well.

Infrastructure and skills
Precondition for proper response
Regional/global epidemiological triangle

Regional/global environment

VECTOR

AGENT

HOST

Local environment

Charles Darwin:

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the most adaptable to change”

“The concept of living in one epidemiological family”
Thank you!

Left- over
MECIDS now has the “start-up” infrastructure and capacity building ability for:

- Surveillance data-sharing
- Emerging and re-emerging diseases
- Dealing with biological terrorism
- Publishing scientific papers

The triangle of success

Funds (Private-public partnership) Governance- Executive Board

Environment of Equity, Trust and Cooperation leading to constant activities
The Future

From a threat to opportunity:
- The next challenge: Pandemic influenza
- Plans have been shared – national exercises are conducted
- Regional table-top exercise in March 2008 also to test the results of IHR-Pandemic flu workshop

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Goals of MECIDS:

- Capacity building (narrowing gaps between countries)
- Multinational research and development
- Data harmonization and standardization
- Data sharing