

South Asia Earthquake and Tsunami: WHO Situation Report No. 1

26 December 2004

A series of earthquakes with epicentres off the Northern Sumatra (Aceh) and resultant tsunamis have hit Southeast Asia caused serious damage and loss of life. The first strongest quake, at 0058 hours GMT had the magnitude of 8.9 on the Richter Scale, followed by a second severe quake (0421 GMT).

Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Maldives, India and Thailand have been affected, and also Malaysia, Bangladesh and Myanmar. There are already reports of considerable numbers of deaths, Indonesia (2,200), Sri Lanka (3,225), Maldives (10), Thailand (257),

Bangladesh(2), India (2,000), and Malaysia (28), and figures can be expected to rise in the coming days. The tsunamis seem also to have caused large scale damage to infrastructures destroying health facilities, etc. Besides the need for mass management of casualties in hospitals, WHO foresees the urgent need for reactivation and boosting the capacities of local systems for health care delivery. At short term, in a few days, additional threats to human life can be expected to arise from contaminated water sources. Strong coordination will be needed to make the most of local and national efforts and international good will.



What is WHO doing?

Measuring ill-health and assessing needs:

WHO is collaborating with the Ministries of Health and international partners in the affected countries to help determine the damage, needs and capacities.

On 27 December:

- A senior WHO official is on the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) evaluation team travelling to *Sri Lanka*.
- In *Indonesia*, WHO will join the Ministry of Health in a rapid assessment of the situation in Northern Sumatra.
- The WHO Representative for *Thailand* will be assessing affected areas in that country.
- The WHO country team is on stand by in *Myanmar*.

Coordinating joint action for health:

- Two staff from WHO office in Nepal are being mobilized to assist the regional relief operation.

- Two senior staff from Headquarters are travelling to Delhi, and additional experts are being mobilized from Headquarters, and Regional Offices for Europe and Western Pacific. Staff is on stand by in PAHO/WHO..

Filling critical gaps in health response:

- WHO is mobilizing funds for local costs and emergency supplies, emergency health kits, etc. and make them available to WHO country offices in affected country to ensure that they can contribute and fill gaps as emerging from the first assessments
- Starting with its collaboration with UNDAC, WHO will work hand-in hand with national authorities so that international assistance translates in prompt and appropriate reactivation of local health systems

Donor participation: Initial funding for immediate action has been provided by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Given the ampler of the disaster, is easy to forecast that the scale of the needs will be large, and WHO will keep its partners updated on the requirements.