

1. Background

The International Health Regulations (IHR) (2005) is a legally binding international agreement to help prevent the spread of disease. The IHR (2005) outlines the core capacities to detect, report and rapidly respond to public health threats whether occurring naturally or due to deliberate or accidental events. As required under the IHR, WHO helps ensure the regular assessment of countries' core capacities. This is done through the IHR monitoring and evaluation framework which consists of four components: annual reporting, post-event reviews, simulation exercises and joint external evaluations, or JEEs. These components are not new to the region and have been an integral component of APSED for over a decade.

The Joint External Evaluation (JEE) process was developed by WHO in collaboration with partners and initiatives such as the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA) to address the recommendation of the *IHR Review Committee on Second Extensions for Establishing National Public Health Capacities and on IHR Implementation (WHA 68/22 Add.1)* to combine self-assessment, peer review and voluntary joint external evaluations involving both national and international experts. JEE is an important element of monitoring and evaluation under the Asia Pacific Strategy for Emerging Diseases and Public Health Emergencies (APSED III).

The JEE is a voluntary process in which a team of national and international experts jointly assess country capacity under the IHR (2005). It is a multisectoral process recognizing that infectious disease threats to humans can emerge from other humans, commercial livestock, and wildlife; and surveillance, testing and response capabilities need to exist to respond to threats that could arise from any of these sectors. Response functions for outbreaks, regardless of origin or source, can exist within multiple sectors, including disaster response, security and defense.

The JEE process starts with an orientation workshop for in-country focal points to gain a common understanding on JEE. This is followed by the evaluation process, which comprises of two stages: (1) an initial self-evaluation conducted by the host country using the JEE tool which is critical for the success of the overall JEE and (2) a joint evaluation conducted by a team of national and international experts. The WHO JEE tool is intended to assess country capacity to prevent, detect, and respond to public health threats regardless of whether they are naturally occurring, deliberate, or accidental.

2. Objectives

- to measure country specific status and progress in achieving IHR core capacities;
- to allow countries to identify the most urgent needs within their health security system;
- to inform the updating and revision of national work plans, prioritizing opportunities for enhanced preparedness;
- to engage with current and prospective donors and partners to target resources effectively; and
- to build trust and foster transparency and mutual accountability between Member States.

3. Joint External Evaluation (JEE) Tool

The Joint External Evaluation Tool (JEE Tool) – International Health Regulations (2005)¹ was developed by WHO, in consultation with partners, and is based on the annual IHR monitoring framework questionnaire and other assessment tools including from the Global Health Security Agenda (GHSA). The tool has 19 technical areas arranged according to the following core elements:

- **Preventing and reducing the likelihood of outbreaks** and other public health hazards and events defined by IHR.
- Detecting threats early can save lives.
- **Rapid and effective response** requires multi-sectoral, national and international coordination and communication.

PREVENT

1. National Legislation, Policy and Financing
2. IHR Coordination, Communication and Advocacy
3. Anti-microbial Resistance (AMR)
4. Zoonotic Disease
5. Food Safety
6. Biosafety and Biosecurity
7. Immunization

DETECT

1. National Laboratory System
2. Real Time Surveillance
3. Reporting
4. Workforce Development

RESPOND

1. Preparedness
2. Emergency Response Operations
3. Linking Public Health and Security Authorities
4. Medical Countermeasures and Personnel Deployment
5. Risk Communication

Other IHR related HAZARDS and PoEs

1. Point of Entries (PoEs)
2. Chemical Events
3. Radiation Emergencies

This tool specifically helps to:

- Determine capacity;
- Inform development of implementation plans or roadmaps;
- *Measure progress on work implemented* across the IHR Core Capacities; and
- *Highlight needs* for current and prospective donors and partners, and inform country level planning and priority setting.

¹ <http://www.who.int/iris/handle/10665/204368>

4. JEE Process

An IHR JEE mission is requested by the host country through the Ministry of Health (e.g. the National IHR Focal Point) to WHO. The request for a JEE should be made at least three months before the desired date of the JEE visit.

Phase 1: Self-assessment

The country completes a self-evaluation report in collaboration with relevant in-country representatives and stakeholders, using the JEE tool. This provides an internal reflection of the country's IHR capacities and capabilities across all 19 technical areas. Recognizing that achieving these capacities is a multi-sectoral activity, stakeholders from relevant sectors should participate in the evaluation. These stakeholders are asked to provide all information necessary (including supporting documentation) to facilitate a thorough understanding of the country's capabilities for each technical area.

During the self-assessment, WHO and country counterparts should begin to jointly prepare a draft agenda for the joint external evaluation mission.

Phase 2: Joint External assessment

The host country shares the completed self-evaluation report with the JEE Team. The JEE Team is comprised of experts from Member States, WHO, and other key international organizations. Over the course of approximately 5-10 days, national experts present their country's capacity in the 19 technical areas of the JEE tool. All relevant sectors participate in presentations and discussions. The JEE Team collaborates with host country officials to assign scores for each indicator and to identify strengths, progress, areas requiring improvement, challenges, and one to five key priority actions for each technical area.

Field trips enhance the JEE Team's knowledge and understanding of national capacities. Preliminary results are presented to high-level national representatives from relevant sectors at the end of the mission. A final report is typically completed within two weeks and shared with the host country for feedback, after which it is posted online.

JEE mission objectives

- to assess national capacities and capabilities in relation to the 19 technical areas of the Joint External Evaluation (JEE) tool;
- to provide data to guide national efforts to meet obligations under the International Health Regulations (2005);
- to produce a final report that identifies progress, areas for improvement and priority actions for further strengthening IHR core capacities; and
- to share the JEE report and country experiences with stakeholders including through the annual APSED Technical Advisory Group meeting, when possible.

Scheduling the JEE

The country should liaise with WHO to schedule dates for the JEE mission. Scheduling can take place before or after the self-assessment is completed but the self-assessment report must be completed before the joint external evaluation team visit to the country.

5. Coordinating with other ministries

The JEE includes assessment of capacities that go beyond the health sector. The planning of JEE requires coordination of the various government sectors responsible for capacities to prevent, detect, and respond to public health events of international concern. Stakeholders may include, but are not limited to, ministries of health, agriculture, wildlife, environment and defense.

6. Joint External Evaluation Team

Composition of the JEE team

The JEE team should have expertise spanning the 19 technical areas of the JEE. The JEE team comprises approximately 6-10 international members including WHO staff based outside the host country. A comparable number of national experts are selected by the host country. Selected team members should ideally have subject matter expertise in more than one technical area of the JEE. Composition of the team should be such that team members can collectively conduct the evaluation effectively. An international team lead and a national team lead will be selected, agreed to by WHO and the host country. All team leads undergo briefings and orientation on the JEE tool, its implementation and how to facilitate and moderate the various sessions during the WHO IHR JEE mission. The JEE Team may also include a small number (1-3) of observers or peer reviewers. It is recommended that at least one person (who is not a technical member of the JEE team) acts as a report writer.

Terms of reference for evaluators

1. Develop strong familiarity with the JEE tool and practical understanding of the assessment process;
2. Review the host country's completed self-evaluation report and relevant national documents to identify capacity strengths and weakness as well as areas for clarification;
3. Engage in active discussion with country experts on capacity, capabilities, procedures and experience across the various technical areas of the JEE tool;
4. Inform the review of national priorities and the revision of existing relevant institutional plans to integrate and accommodate actions and resources needed to address identified needs;
5. Issue a final report describing the country status, progress made, challenges, and areas requiring improvement for implementation of the IHR capacities;

6. Oversees and contributes to writing of each technical area for which they are responsible;
7. Where relevant, share experience and lessons learned from the JEE, including through the APSED technical advisory group (TAG) meetings; and
8. Other specific objectives can be included based on the needs of each Member State.

Terms of reference of the IHR JEE Team Lead, and responsibilities of the Technical Area Lead and Co-lead are shown in Annexes 1 and 2.

7. JEE mission agenda

Duration

The duration of the JEE mission ranges between 5 to 10 days based on the country context and other factors.

Scope

The JEE visit should include briefings with key stakeholders from all relevant sectors (health, agriculture, and other relevant sectors), active discussion/analysis of the strengths and areas requiring improvement in the system, and a daily debriefing with all stakeholders who participated in the day's sessions.

For some evaluations, the agenda may include site visits to facilities, both at the national and sub-national level. In these cases, the Joint External Evaluation Team should ensure the appropriate security clearances and approvals.

Agenda development

The Country prepares a draft agenda and potential site visits for the joint external evaluation in coordination with WHO. This drafting of the joint external evaluation visit agenda can be done during the self-assessment phase of the evaluation. The country then coordinates with WHO and the Joint Evaluation Team Lead to finalize the draft agenda. Specific attention should be paid to ensure that all of the IHR Capacities are covered in the proposed agenda and all relevant stakeholders/ sectors are included.

Since each country's systems and capabilities will differ, each country is expected to tailor the agenda to reflect its own internal structures and programs. In addition to site visits, the agenda should include briefings with key stakeholders from all relevant sectors (relevant health, agriculture, defense and other sectors), active discussion/analysis of the strengths and areas requiring improvement, in the system, and a daily debriefing.

Sample agenda - Option A

| Day | Activities |
|-------------------|---|
| Day 1 (Friday) | Briefing with government |
| Day 2 (Saturday) | Orientation on the JEE tool and process for Evaluation team members |
| Day 3 (Sunday) | Review of self-evaluation findings |
| Day 4 (Monday) | Site visits and informal technical discussions |
| Day 5 (Tuesday) | Technical area discussions |
| Day 6 (Wednesday) | Technical area discussions |
| Day 7 (Thursday) | Synthesis of findings and preparation for feedback to government |
| Day 8 (Friday) | Joint review of JEE scores and Debriefing |

Sample agenda - Option B

| Day | Activities |
|-------------------|--|
| Day 1 (Sunday) | Orientation on the JEE tool and process Review of self-evaluation findings |
| Day 2 (Monday) | Briefing with government Technical area discussions |
| Day 3 (Tuesday) | Site visits and informal technical discussions |
| Day 4 (Wednesday) | Technical area discussions |
| Day 5 (Thursday) | Technical area discussions Synthesis of findings and preparation for feedback to government |
| Day 6 (Friday) | Joint review of JEE scores and Debriefing |

8. Mission report

The final report contains an analysis of the country's capabilities including the scores for each technical area and areas for improvement. Once the JEE team completes the Final Report, WHO will share the report with the country for feedback and finalization. With the country's permission, the final report is made publically available and shared through APSED TAG meetings. Conclusions from the joint external evaluation may be used to report to WHO governing bodies.

9. Using Findings for National Planning

The results of the external evaluation should be used to inform the development or update of national work plans in line with the newly developed APSED III. APSED III serves as a common

framework for action to advance IHR core capacity in the Asia Pacific region. These work plans should be costed and used to mobilize financial resources from government and external partners where needed.

10. JEE Mission Logistics

The country and WHO country office will coordinate all in-country logistics for the Joint External Evaluation Team during the mission, including, but not limited to, meeting spaces, ground transportation, site visits, visas, accommodations and translation services.

The country is responsible for assuming the cost of all in-country logistical preparations but can request WHO support. The country does not cover the costs of flights, lodging or per diem for the JEE team members, where applicable.

11. Role of WHO

WHO (HQ, regional and country offices) serves as the primary coordinating body for scheduling, rostering the international team members, planning and logistics for evaluation visits, and working with the host country. Once put together, the JEE team works with WHO and the host country to prepare for the evaluation, including all aspects of administrative and logistical support.

Country Office (where applicable)

- Serves as the primary contact point of WHO for the JEE;
- Coordinates with government on scheduled dates for the Evaluation Visit and update the Regional Office focal point for JEE;
- Assists host country as requested in completing the Self-Evaluation, including bringing together all in-country stakeholders (ministries, partners, etc.);
- Provides background documentation that will support the evaluation analysis;
- Supports host country in developing the agenda for the Evaluation Visit;
- Supports host country to ensure all logistical arrangements are in place for the Evaluation Visit (selection of hotel, meeting spaces, ground transportation, coffee/lunches, translation services, etc.); and
- Supports host country in using findings for national planning in line with APSED III.

Regional Office

- Serves as the primary contact point of WHO for JEE, where there is no WHO Country Office;
- Coordinates with Member States to schedule joint external evaluations in the Region;

- Informs Member States about the JEE process through regional forums such as the Regional Committee Meeting and APSED TAG meetings;
- Identifies international experts to serve on the Evaluation Teams; and
- Facilitates the joint external evaluation upon the request of a country:
 - Schedule evaluation visit with the host country
 - Provide host country with necessary materials to complete Self-Evaluation
 - Identify experts to serve in the evaluation team
 - Lead preparatory calls ahead of each joint evaluation mission
 - Provide the international evaluation team members with background materials and documentation from the Self-Evaluation
 - Facilitate logistical support to host country, international evaluation team members, and observers as needed.

Headquarters

- Provides back-up support for JEE missions, as needed;
- Facilitates progress reporting to the WHO Governing Bodies, as needed;
- Mobilizes resources and in-kind support for the evaluation process;
Maintains a register of joint external evaluations scheduled globally;
- Maintains a global roster of experts for JEE missions;
- Coordinates, collaborate and liaise with other international efforts; and
- Develops international guidance documents to support the JEE process.

Annex 1. Terms of Reference of IHR JEE Team Lead

- Review and finalize the JEE visit agenda in collaboration with the country and WHO;
- Co-lead JEE team preparatory call with the WHO IHR Regional Office monitoring team as necessary;
- Coordinate and lead in-country orientation meeting of the JEE team prior to the start of the JEE mission to review the agenda and discuss any outstanding logistical needs;
- Oversee the JEE:
 - Ensure that all team members are aware of and meet their roles and responsibilities, particularly in guiding discussions and drafting the final report sections related to their areas of expertise.
 - Efficiently and professionally manage the JEE agenda.
 - Manage facilitated discussions related to scoring among team members and the host country.
 - Conduct daily debriefs and a final debrief with the JEE team and country officials at the conclusion of the evaluation visit.
 - Lead development of the executive summary with support of report writer(s) and WHO senior staff
 - Oversee the drafting and submission of the final report working together with the WHO Regional Office focal point who will be responsible for submitting the draft version to the country and the final version to WHO HQ.

Annex 2. Responsibilities of Technical Area Lead and Co-Lead

Technical Area Lead Responsibilities

- **Lead and facilitate dialogue** with host country participants to elicit sufficient information to generate a score on each indicator in a collaborative manner
- **Manage time** according to schedule
- **Make a 3-5 minute oral presentation** summarizing strengths and areas for improvement to the host government on the last day of the evaluation
- **Write the assigned Technical Area section(s)** of the draft report in the format provided
- **Submit the written technical area** report to the Team Leader, and copy the report writer and WHO Focal point within a week of the evaluation

Technical Area Co-lead Responsibilities

- **Support and work with the Technical Area Lead** in fulfilling their responsibilities
- **Raise and/or highlight relevant issues** during the discussions based on expert knowledge and experience
- **Make notes on key issues and recommendations** raised during discussions and work with the Technical Area Lead to consolidate key issues, priorities and recommendations
- **Review assigned technical area sections** of the final report