

The Republic of South Sudan



Ministry of Health

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Press Statement

Ministry of Health Launches Field Epidemiology Training Program (FETP) to strengthen epidemiologic capacity of the public health workforce to ensure national health security

Effective disease detection, investigation, and response require a public health workforce well-trained in the principles and practice of field epidemiology. Since 1980, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US CDC) has worked with Ministries of Health (MOHs) throughout the world to establish and support Field Epidemiology Training Programs (FETPs). These programs are recognized worldwide as an effective means to strengthen countries' capacity in surveillance, epidemiology, and outbreak response. Health professionals who join FETPs are trained to be expert practitioners of field (or applied) epidemiology.

The US CDC, in collaboration with the African Field Epidemiology Network (AFENET) has supported Ministries of Health in Sub Saharan Africa to implement FETPs for public health workers at national and subnational levels of the health systems. FETPs are field-based trainings where participants spend minimum (25%) time in classroom and maximum (75%) time in the field, at their jobs, providing public health services while acquiring core competencies in field epidemiology including public health surveillance, data analysis and interpretation, outbreak investigation and response, epidemiologic methods and scientific communication.

In order to address the need to improve field epidemiology capacity for early detection and rapid response to infectious disease outbreaks and other public health threats at all levels of the health system, US CDC and partners, including AFENET and WHO, adopted a three - tiered pyramid model for FETP implementation. At the base of the pyramid is the 3-months Frontline FETP that targets public health workers at the local level, the middle of the pyramid is the 9-

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months Intermediate FETP for regional level health workers and at the peak is the 2-years Advanced FETP for national level public health managers.

Cognizant of the potential field epidemiology capacity development has to strengthen the country's public health systems and programs as well as fast track attainment of IHR core capacities for prevention, detection and response to public health threats, the Republic of South Sudan embarked on training selected senior health professionals in the 2-year advanced field epidemiology training at the Kenya FETP. Between 2007 and 2012, a total of 16 health professionals comprising 09 medical doctors, 05 lab scientists, 01 dentists and 01 veterinarian completed the advanced FETP. However, this number is inadequate to achieve the global health security agenda (GHSA) workforce development action package target of 1 trained field epidemiologist per 200,000 of the population.

Inadequate skilled workforce, especially at the local and subnational levels of the health system, for implementation of the 2005 International Health Regulation (IHR) core requirements for prevention, detection and response to public health emergencies as well as the absence of a field epidemiology training program in the country, were among the major findings of the 2017 joint external evaluation for the Republic of South Sudan. In order to address these gaps, the South Sudan national action plan for health security (NAPHS), 2020 – 2024, has prioritized the implementation of field epidemiology training for public health workers at the national and subnational levels.

To address the epidemiologic capacity gaps at the local and subnational levels of the health system, in November 2021, the Ministry of Health in collaboration with the U.S CDC, World Health Organization (WHO) country office and AFENET started implementing a frontline FETP, a 3-month in-service field-based training program focused on detecting and responding to diseases and events of public health importance or international concern. Participants learn and practice the fundamental skills used in frontline surveillance including use of case definitions, disease detection and reporting, summarizing of data using simple tables and

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graphs, case investigation, outbreak investigation and response, surveillance monitoring and evaluation, and data analysis and interpretation for decision making.

Today, the 28th of March 2022, the Ministry of Health is proud to officially launch FETP through the graduation of the first cohort of twenty-one (2 National, 10 State, 2 Administrative Area and 7 County) Surveillance Officers as Frontline Field Epidemiologists. Through subsequent cohorts of frontline FETP graduates, the MOH plans to have a network of well-trained surveillance officers and other public health workers in country who will contribute to increased capacity to recognize public health problems pertinent to the population, increased completion and accuracy of surveillance data reporting and analysis at state and county levels, increased capacity to provide descriptive analysis of a public health problem, and stronger culture of data-based decision making. Also, the frontline FETP graduates will play a critical role in scaling the implementation of the WHO African Region IDSR third edition, that the country recently adapted to strengthen its public health surveillance system.

The Ministry of Health would like to assure the people of the Republic of South Sudan of its commitment to ensure national health security by working with development partners like US CDC, WHO, AFENET and other partners to address the field epidemiology capacity gaps in the country as reported in the Joint External Evaluation for International Health Regulation (IHR) core capacities for prevention, detection and response to public health events.

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