



SPOTLIGHT

Epi Info Strengthens Iraq’s Surveillance Capacity

Communicable diseases remain the leading cause of illness, death and disability globally and in Iraq. Even though well-known efficacious responses are available for the control and prevention of these diseases, the capacity for timely detection, confirmation and response actions needs reliable public health systems. To support Iraq’s efforts to develop these systems, the USAID Primary Health Care Project in Iraq (PHCPI) is working to improve the capacity of the Ministry of Health’s (MOH’s) surveillance staff on the already established Epi Info surveillance program to strengthen their capacity on outbreak detection and preparedness and response across Iraq.

Epi Info Builds Surveillance Capacity

PHCPI worked to improve the capacity of the MOH’s Surveillance Unit’s staff on the already established Epi Info to strengthen their capacity in outbreak detection, analysis and reporting in the 102 districts across Iraq (Ninawa, SalahDin and Anbar were excluded), especially those hosting internally displaced persons (IDPs). PHCPI, together with the MOH, built surveillance capabilities through trainings that will strengthen the districts’ capacity for outbreak detection and, ultimately, response at the district-level. Training participants received a training guide developed by the project and transferred to CDs for distribution. Epi Info allows for rapid development of a questionnaire, customization of the data entry process, quick data input and quick analysis of the data, significantly decreasing the response time in case of an outbreak. In December 2014, PHCPI completed the trainings for 261 staff on Epi Info. With this achievement, districts no longer need to use a paper-based surveillance method, significantly impacting

surveillance, analysis and reporting of communicable diseases. Most districts began sending electronic reports as of January 2015.

Trainers of Trainers Expand Epi Info Utilization

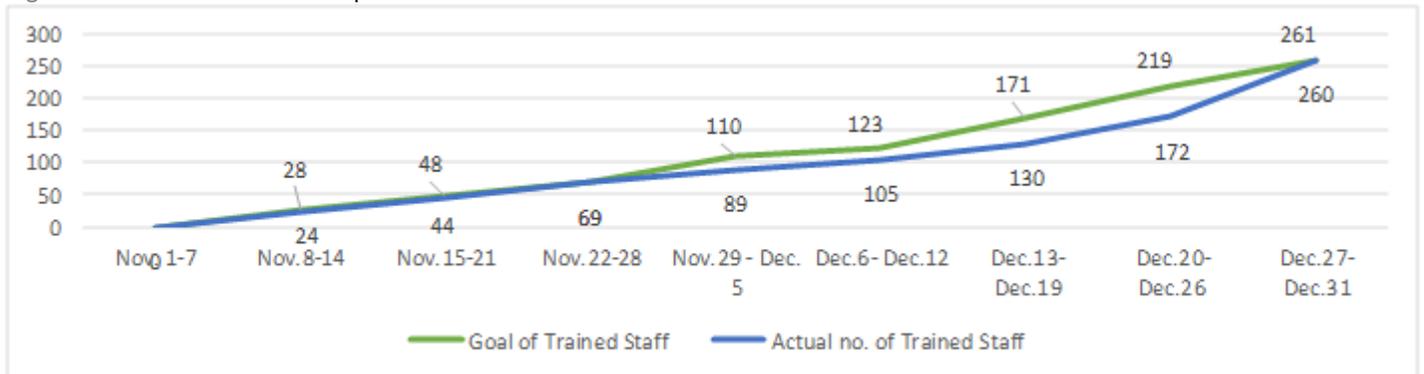
As the MOH had only ten trainers of trainers (TOTs) throughout Iraq able to conduct workshops for Epi Info 3.5.3, PHCPI coordinated Epi Info TOT workshops for the Directorates of Health (DOHs). This will not only enable the Ministry to further training and initiate Epi Info at the primary health care (PHC) clinic-level but a core of TOTs will be established at the governorate-level, decentralizing the trainings. PHCPI conducted three TOT trainings for at least two members from each DOH to ensure sustainability and future cascade trainings for the PHCCs. Fifty four TOTs were established during PHCPI’s trainings.

These five-day workshops had one day dedicated to generic TOT lessons while the others covered topics for the different aspects of Epi Info used for surveillance, such as, creating forms, data analysis and pivot table formation. The trainings utilized plenary discussion, group work, group discussion, presentation and discussion, lectures, mini lectures, brainstorming, and practical implementation of these concepts.

Epi Info 7 Provides Portability and Language Capabilities

Currently, the MOH is using Epi Info 3.5, however, the latest version, Epi Info 7, is the presently maintained Epi Info product line. After presenting the similarities between the currently used version and the upgraded version to the Center for Communicable Disease Control (CDCC), PHCPI conducted a five-

Figure 1 MOH Staff Trained on Epi Info 3.5

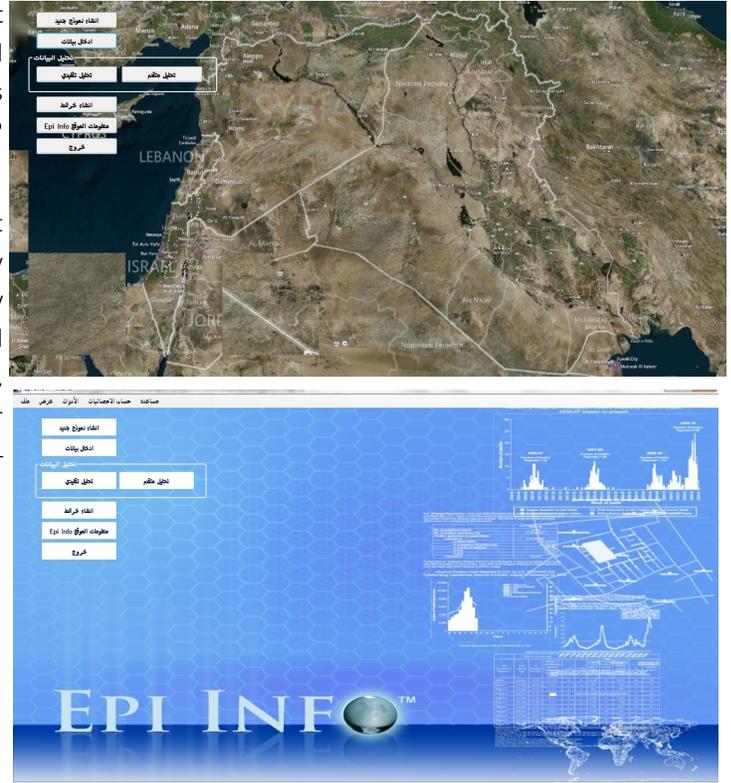


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day training at the CDCC for 16-20 persons on the current version. Epi Info 7 makes data analysis and collection easier and the availability of version 7 on smart phones and tablets allows for high portability of the system, key in areas with high IDP concentrations and remote/rural areas.

PHCPI has also translated Epi Info 7 into Arabic benefitting not only Iraq but also all the Arab countries in the region by incorporating the user's native language into the program. Many data entry users will not necessarily be proficient in English and will be unable to fully understand and use the program. However, by breaching the language barrier, the MOH can train a wider array of staff on Epi Info at all levels (i.e. hospitals, PHCCs, sub-clinics, etc.) of the health care system.



Event's Name	Total
Training on EpiInfo 3.5 and 7	261
TOT on EpiInfo 3.5	58
Total for Epi Info surveillance program	319

Below: MOH staff participating in PHCPI's Epi Info TOT training in Erbil

Above: Translation of Epi Info 7 into Arabic.

