Short Communication

Coronavirus Disease 2019 Pandemic: Improving the Outbreak Readiness and Response in Camp Settings

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Abstract

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has accounted for the jeopardizing the health care delivery system and exposure of the lack of preparedness and emergency response plan. If this is the status of the general population, it is difficult to imagine the outcome of the outbreak for population groups who are living in camps or similar settings due to an ongoing humanitarian emergency. Acknowledging the specific and unique needs of the vulnerable population groups living in camp settings, guidelines have been formulated to improve the readiness and response action to the potential outbreak of the disease. This is the need of the hour as it will aid in reducing the probability of transmission of infection, early identification & provision of appropriate treatment to the infected people, strengthen the risk communication mechanism to provide trustworthy information, and will also guide in implementing a multi-sectoral response to the viral infection. In conclusion, in the fight against COVID-19 outbreak, it is the responsibility of the health stakeholders to ensure that the outbreak readiness and response strategies should be extended to the vulnerable population groups who are living in camp settings due to an ongoing humanitarian emergency.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic, Outbreak readiness, Camp, World Health Organization

Introduction

The coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has accounted for jeopardizing the health-care delivery system and exposure of the lack of preparedness and emergency response plan.[1] The available global estimates suggest that since the start of the outbreak, a total of 15,012,731 cases and 619,150 deaths have been reported across the affected 216 nations and territories.[2] The American region and the European region are the most affected; nevertheless, estimates are rapidly increasing now in the South East Asian region.[2] All these estimates are an eye-opener for the public health authorities and justify the indispensable need to mount a multisectoral and a well-coordinated-cum-accelerated approach to this novel infection.[1,2]

Vulnerability in camp settings

If this is the status of the general population, it is difficult to imagine the outcome of the outbreak for population groups who are living in camps or similar settings due to an ongoing humanitarian emergency.[3] Even under normal circumstances, these groups of people are exposed to neglect, stigma, and find it extremely difficult to access health-care services, in contrast to the general population. However, considering the fact that the disease is primarily transmitted by close contact, the situation becomes even more complex for people living in such sites, as they are already being subjected to overcrowding, population displacement, improper sanitation and hygiene facilities, and poor quality of health-care services, all of which together play an important role in increasing the likelihood of acquiring the infection.[3]

Potential recommendations

Acknowledging the specific and unique needs of the vulnerable population groups living in camp settings, guidelines have

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been formulated to improve the readiness and response action to the potential outbreak of the disease.[3] This is the need of the hour as it will aid in reducing the probability of transmission of infection, early identification, and provision of appropriate treatment to the infected people, will strengthen the risk communication mechanism to provide trustworthy information, and will also guide in implementing a multisectoral response to the viral infection.[3,4] The first and foremost thing is to inspect the camp site for risk assessment with regard to the introduction and propagation of the infection and accordingly draft a customized multisectoral response plan. This inspection will essentially include identification of the high-risk areas (overcrowded areas) and should also explore the option of physical replanning of the site, with an intention to ensure better infection prevention and social distancing.[1,3,4]

Other strategies

One of the crucial components of response and readiness to the infection has been the presence of a risk communication and community engagement action plan.[5] The same thing needs to be in place even in camp sites, as these locations are very much prone to misinformation and rumors and thus there has to be an inbuilt mechanism to neutralize such situations, as these false beliefs might eventually aggravate the entire problem.[5] Being a disease of infectious origin, which is highly contagious, it becomes an utmost priority to ensure that the cases of the disease are detected at the earliest, and appropriate epidemiological investigation including contact tracing and monitoring of contacts for 14 days is a must.[3,4] It will be ideal to deploy a rapid response team, which can play a critical role in streamlining of all these processes in the camp sites. Further, a laboratory facility should be earmarked for sending the samples of the people and appropriate arrangement for the transportation of samples need to be ensured.[4]

These services should go hand-in-hand with screening of individuals who are coming to the campsites from outside and should essentially comprise of temporary isolation, obtaining details about potential exposure, and not just limit with temperature recording.[3] The role of infection prevention and control services cannot be ignored and all steps should be taken to ensure hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene through strengthening of water supply and sanitation facilities.[4] This should be further supplemented by the provision of necessary personal protective equipment for the symptomatic individuals and their contacts who are involved as caregivers.[4] Moreover, liaison should be established with health facilities for referral, treatment, and discharge of patients from the campsites, and opportunities for home-based care for mild forms of disease should also be explored.[3] Finally, due emphasis should be given toward maintaining the timely supply of logistics and other equipment required for prevention or timely management of the cases.[1,3,4] However, it is extremely important to ensure that all the above services are carried out without compromising the routine health care to these vulnerable population groups.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the fight against COVID-19 outbreak, it is the responsibility of the health stakeholders to ensure that the outbreak readiness and response strategies should be extended to the vulnerable population groups who are living in camp settings due to an ongoing humanitarian emergency. The need of the hour is to safeguard the health and interests of everyone and not discriminate people just because they are not the part of the normal society.

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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