

# H.E.L.P.



ICRC

**A training course  
for the management of health interventions  
in armed conflicts**



ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross

H.E.L.P. Courses

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## **H.E.L.P. Courses**

## **The H.E.L.P. course: a multicultural and multidisciplinary learning experience**

The H.E.L.P. course was created in 1986 by the International Committee of the Red Cross to upgrade professionalism in humanitarian assistance programmes conducted in emergency situations.

These courses have been given in various parts of Latin America, North America, Africa, Asia, Western and Eastern Europe. Since 1986, over 3000 health professionals and humanitarian aid workers from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, United Nations agencies, NGOs, ministries of health, armed forces medical services and academic institutions have attended the course.

## **A joint effort**

The course is organized in partnership with academic institutions, WHO (World Health Organization), PAHO (Pan-American Health Organization), and National Red Cross Societies. Our current academic partners are:

**In Ouidah, Benin:**  
**Institut régional de santé publique**

**In Baltimore, USA:**  
**Johns Hopkins University, Bloomberg School of Public Health and School of Medicine**

**In Honolulu/Hawaii, USA:**  
**Center of Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance, University of Hawaii**

**In Geneva, Switzerland:**  
**University of Geneva, Faculty of Medicine and HUG (Hôpitaux Universitaires Genevois)**

**In Cuernavaca, Mexico:**  
**Instituto Nacional de Salud Publica Cruz Roja Mexicana**

**In Fukuoka, Japan:**  
**The Japanese Red Cross Kyusho International University of Nursing**

**In Nairobi, Kenya:**  
**The Kenya Red Cross Society**

**In Beijing, China:**  
**Beida, School of Public Health Peking University**

**In Doha, Qatar:**  
**The Qatar Red Crescent Society**

**In Cuba, La Habana:**  
**Centro Latino de Medicina de Desastres**

## Goals

The H.E.L.P. course comprises two indissociable weeks' course. The first week focuses on public health activities and the second deals with communicable diseases and epidemiology. IHL, security and ethics are also dealt with during week 2.

## Week 1

### Health Emergencies in Large Populations

The purpose of the first week is to provide the public health tools necessary for making appropriate decisions in emergency situations involving large populations.

During the course the participants are encouraged to share their field experiences. The course prepares the ground for common approaches to public health among humanitarian organizations, thus contributing to better programme coordination in emergency operations. The main topics are: economic security and water and environment.

## Week 2

### Health Emergencies in Large Populations

The second week focuses on communicable diseases, epidemiology. International Humanitarian Law and ethics are also covered in week 2.

# Health Emergencies in Large Populations – week 1

## Planning

An overview of the main steps of the planning process provides the participants with common terminology.

Topics include:

- identification of health problems;
- identification of constraints;
- selection of priorities;
- determination of objectives and strategies;
- mobilization of resources;
- implementation of activities;
- evaluation of results.

This planning methodology is applied throughout the course.

## Nutrition and economic security

Malnutrition, lack of income and lack of economic security at household level are serious problems in emergency situations. An insufficient food supply and increased poverty create significant health risks. Proper planning for programme implementation, adequate surveillance and effective assessment of needs and constraints are essential for a pragmatic and realistic assistance programme.

The course focuses on the following:

- nutritional evaluation, including assessment of vitamin and micronutrient deficiencies, sampling techniques for surveillance, data collection and anthropometrics measurements;

- household security evaluations and rapid rural assessment methods;
- methodical guidelines for planning, implementation and surveillance of general and specific food-aid operations and feeding centres.



## Environmental health

Survival without water is impossible.

The provision of an adequate supply of safe water is an absolute priority in any emergency action. Poor hygiene, overcrowding and pests are the main killers during emergencies.



The course addresses:

- environmental conditions favouring the occurrence and persistence of various pathogens;
- basic methods for emergency water supply, black water treatment, garbage disposal, vector control, emergency shelter and energy assistance.

## Communicable disease control

Control of communicable diseases is a major problem in disaster situations, especially where large concentrations of people are living in precarious conditions of hygiene.

The course covers:

- strategies for controlling the main communicable diseases (diarrhoeal diseases, malaria, cholera, tuberculosis, measles, tetanus, intestinal parasites, HIV/AIDS, etc.);

- integration of various fields of activity such as environmental health, health promotion, community participation, disease prevention and basic medical care, bearing in mind the constraints that are part of any disaster situation.

## Health care services

Disasters are characterized by a heavy demand for curative care, which may overwhelm existing health services. But prevention of illness and injury is also a key component of primary health care services in emergencies, and should be closely integrated with curative services. Special consideration must be given to vulnerable groups such as women and children. Reproductive health and management of childhood illnesses are major challenges during crisis situations.

The course addresses:

- basic understanding of health care systems;
- support for existing health care facilities;
- creation of new facilities such as hospitals, clinics, mobile teams;
- essential drug programmes and drug donations;
- establishing child survival measures;
- reducing risks of maternal mortality;
- meeting reproductive health needs.

## Mental health

The humanitarian organizations have become increasingly aware of the mental health needs which emerge among victims of disasters. This is a problem that was neglected for too long, and it is now a must to address it in a professional manner.

Participants therefore learn:

- to define the basics of the concept of mental health;
- to recognize the basic characteristics of mental health in individuals and communities;
- to know the differences between mental health problems and mental diseases;
- to identify factors that affect mental health and that give rise to mental health problems in conflict situations and among refugees and displaced populations, and to address priority needs;
- to identify the main resources for implementation of emergency mental health assistance programmes;
- to identify priority target groups for mental health assistance.





## Health information systems and epidemiology

Epidemiology is an essential tool in any relief operation. In an emergency situation the initial health assessment, the monitoring of assistance programmes and the evaluation of the impact of the relief operation must be documented by an effective health information system.

Basic epidemiological tools are reviewed:

- definition of epidemiological terms;
- selection of health indicators in emergency situations;
- methods of data collection in emergencies;
- data analysis;
- establishment of surveillance and health information systems.

## Health systems

Health systems in emergencies encompass environmental engineering, food and household economic security measures, primary health care, mental health and curative and preventive secondary health care services. These include community-based services as well as the international relief response. All these components together form a comprehensive health system.

During the course special attention is given to examining the interaction between these components and identifying the key elements needed to improve the functioning of health systems in emergency situations.



# Health Emergencies in Large Populations – week 2

## Dilemmas faced by health professionals in humanitarian operations

Health professionals have to make difficult choices in armed conflicts.

Some examples:

- triage of the wounded;
- deciding on the appropriate level of health care;
- providing assistance when there is limited control over its delivery;
- providing assistance in poor security situations;
- providing assistance in situations where it may facilitate violation of fundamental human rights;

- dealing with evidence of torture and mutilation used as means of punishment.

To help professionals take appropriate decisions on such matters, the relevant instruments in the fields of international humanitarian law, human rights and health ethics are studied.

## International humanitarian law

International humanitarian law (IHL) forms a major part of international law. It comprises the rules, which, in times of armed conflict, protect persons who are not or no longer involved in the fighting, and restrict the methods and means of warfare employed.

The course focuses on:

- application of IHL in international and non-international armed conflicts, and its applicability in new types of conflicts;
- identification of the main rules relating to the protection of health;
- rules for the protection of health professionals;
- the latest developments of IHL, specifically in the field of new weapons;
- the role of the ICRC in promoting and developing IHL;
- the use of the Red Cross/Red Crescent emblem.

## Health and human rights

The interrelation between health and human rights is widely reflected in international conventions and agreements. These include the Universal Declaration of

Human Rights, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the UN General Assembly Declaration on the Principles of Medical Ethics relevant to the Role of Health Personnel in the Protection of Prisoners and Detainees against Torture

and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

An overview is given of these major legal instruments, with particular reference to:

- the “hard core” of the human rights instruments;
- the complementary roles of IHL and human rights law;
- the advantages of monitoring human rights from the health perspective.



## Professional ethics and health

Ethics should play a predominant role in the development and implementation of health policy, so as to ensure equity, gender sensitivity, and respect for fundamental rights. Health policy should aim to empower people affected by disasters to become self-sufficient. An overview of the main ethical theories and approaches is given, and the main instruments governing ethics in the health professions are considered.

The course includes:

- a review of the main resolutions of the World Medical Association (WMA);
- identification of the principal ethical rules which are applicable in armed conflicts and dictate the behaviour of health professionals;
- consideration of the cultural values of victims and those of societies.

## Responsibilities of health professionals in armed conflicts

The work of health professionals involves a wide range of responsibilities that go beyond just treating the sick and wounded, preventing disease and maintaining health.

The course focuses on other responsibilities such as:

- preventing consequences of armed conflict which may have a major impact on health (e.g. the use of unlawful means of warfare, forced population displacements);
- identifying ethical dilemmas;
- making ethically correct decisions on health-related issues;
- protecting individuals from torture and mutilation;





- restricting the development and use of certain weapons;
- monitoring the health status of populations living under economic sanctions;
- forging a link between health and peace.

Participants consider how they can influence health policies within their own organizations to ensure better respect for ethical standards during relief activities. They also examine possible means of cooperation with professionals from other disciplines, such as lawyers, so that lessons learned from the health perspective can serve as the basis for the development of legal instruments.

## Teaching concepts and methods

The course concentrates on concepts and approaches which have proved to be relevant for humanitarian field activities during emergency situations.

Various teaching methods, including lectures, and group discussions are used. An important part of the course is reserved for case studies, on a simulated case during week 1 and on actual situations during week 2.

Participants are invited to share their personal experiences as well as their cultural background.

## Course dates, registration, fees and credits

For course dates, registration fees and credits, please refer to the specific information on the different courses.

## Working languages

The courses in Geneva, Doha, Fukuoka, Baltimore, Honolulu and Nairobi are given in English.

The course in Beijing (China) is given in English and Chinese (consecutive translation into Chinese).

The course in Ouidah (Benin) is given in French.

The courses in Cuernavaca (Mexico) and La Habana (Cuba) are given in Spanish.

## Participants

A total of 129 different nationalities and over 20 different professions have been represented in H.E.L.P. courses.

The course is intended first and foremost for health professionals: doctors, nurses, nutritionists, environmental health engineers, epidemiologists, public health officers and water and environment engineers.

Other professionals holding decision-making positions in assistance or emergency programmes are also most welcome.

Candidates working in countries affected by war or natural disasters will be given special consideration.

The target number of participants is 25. Certificates of attendance are issued to all participants at the end of the course.

**Up-to-date information can be found  
on the following Web pages:**

[www.icrc.org/helpcourse](http://www.icrc.org/helpcourse)  
[www.jhsph.edu/refugee/training\\_education](http://www.jhsph.edu/refugee/training_education)  
[www.coe-dmha.org/course\\_help.htm](http://www.coe-dmha.org/course_help.htm)  
[www.insp.mx](http://www.insp.mx)  
[www.jrckicn.ac.jp](http://www.jrckicn.ac.jp)  
[www.irsp.bj.refer.org](http://www.irsp.bj.refer.org)  
[www.kenyaredcross.org](http://www.kenyaredcross.org)

**or obtained by writing to one  
of the following e-mail addresses:**

[help@icrc.org](mailto:help@icrc.org)  
[helpcour@jhsph.edu](mailto:helpcour@jhsph.edu)  
[education@coe-dmha.org](mailto:education@coe-dmha.org)  
[ramirezs@correo.insp.mx](mailto:ramirezs@correo.insp.mx)  
[japanhelp11@jrckicn.ac.jp](mailto:japanhelp11@jrckicn.ac.jp)  
[irspadm@intnet.bj](mailto:irspadm@intnet.bj)  
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