

## US, 26 countries launch effort to fight outbreaks (Update)

February 13 2014, by Lauran Neergaard

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The U.S. and 26 other countries began a new effort Thursday to prevent and fight outbreaks of dangerous infectious diseases before they spread around the globe.

U.S. health officials called the Global Health Security Agenda a priority because too many countries lack the health infrastructure necessary to spot a new infection rapidly and sound the alarm before it has time to gain a foothold and even spread into other countries.

Germs "do not recognize or stop at national borders," Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius said Thursday as representatives from participating countries, the World Health Organization and other groups met to discuss plans. "A threat anywhere is indeed a threat everywhere."

Yet fewer than 20 percent of countries are adequately prepared to respond to emerging infections, she said.

Infectious diseases are a growing concern. Just in the past year, China alerted the world that a new type of bird flu was sickening people; a mysterious and deadly new respiratory virus emerged in the Middle East; and scientists detected the spread of some older diseases to new locales including the first appearance of mosquito-borne chikungunya virus in the Caribbean.

New diseases are but a plane ride away, warned Dr. Tom Frieden,

director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"There are too many blind spots around the world," he told reporters in preparation for Thursday's meeting.

The goal of the new effort: Over five years, the U.S. will partner with other countries to bolster local disease monitoring, develop tests for different pathogens and help regions create and strengthen systems to report and respond to public health emergencies.

Last year, the CDC began a pilot project in Uganda to improve detection of such diseases as cholera, drug-resistant tuberculosis and hemorrhagic fevers. Motorcycles raced samples from sick patients in remote parts of the country to provincial capitals, where they could be shipped overnight to a laboratory that could rapidly report the results back.

It "showed that very rapid progress was possible," Frieden said.

This year, the CDC plans to divert \$40 million from its budget for similar projects in 10 other countries, which are yet to be named. In 2015, the Obama administration is seeking \$45 million in new funding to further expand the work.

Countries joining Thursday's launch included Argentina, Australia, Canada, Chile, China, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey, Uganda, Britain and Vietnam.

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