

Preventing pandemics in South Asia

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Singapore: New Zealand's Massey University has successfully completed a four year campaign involving healthcare professionals across major South Asian countries, to prevent the occurrence of pandemics in the region.

The \$10 million One Health program, was conducted in Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Bhutan.

Funded by the World Bank, the University has educated and connected veterinary and human health professionals in these countries, to increase the aware of zoonoses and to prevent its spread and transmission.

The study involved testing of around 8000 humans and animals by 2000 health professionals from 50 government and non-government organizations.

The priority-diseases investigated were rabies (in India, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka), brucellosis (Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka), leptospirosis (Nepal, Sri Lanka), Qfever (Afghanistan), anthrax (Bangladesh) and Crimean Congo Haemorrhagic Fever (Pakistan).

Dr Peter Jolly, One Health South Asia project manager, said, "The findings will be useful in formulating policies to aid the various governments in decisions making to prevent pandemics across the globe."

Stating that the current Ebola epidemic has rung alarm bells for global disease prevention and forecasting epidemics, Dr Jolly said that the project was a significant contribution in battling against emerging diseases.

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The program involved two phases-the first phase involved delivering two degrees-a Master of Public Health (Biosecurity) and Master of Veterinary Medicine (Biosecurity) - to 68 veterinary and public health professionals.

The second phase saw the development of One Health Hubs and collaborative disease investigation projects in each of the countries and launching of an online communication and collaboration network called Hubnet (www.hubnet.asia) that will be used in the future to monitor outbreaks of disease and share information about managing them.