

WADEM Position Statement: Accurate Reporting of Public Health Information

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The mission of the World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (WADEM; Madison, Wisconsin USA) is the global improvement of prehospital and emergency health care, public health, and disaster health and preparedness. Accurate and transparent release of public health information is necessary to inform response and recovery activities associated with disasters.

The resolution to adopt the international health regulations in 2005 recognized the World Health Organization's (Geneva, Switzerland) leadership in monitoring and responding to public health emergencies.¹

Preservation of global health security is reliant upon timely reporting of emergencies and health threats to enable appropriate preparedness and response.²

Withholding, suppression, delayed, or deliberate inaccurate reporting of public health information presents a risk of potential health threats to populations. The restriction of epidemiological health information hampers efforts to respond to events.³

The transparent and timely release of public health information is logical, ethical, and required to maintain and improve global health.

As such, WADEM endorses that:

1. Global health security is reliant upon timely reporting of emergencies and threats to enable appropriate preparedness and response.
2. Withholding, suppression, delayed, or deliberate inaccurate reporting of public health information presents a risk of potential health threats to populations.
3. That Customary International Humanitarian law recognizes the prohibition of attacks on, destruction of, or render useless any public health infrastructure indispensable to the survival of the civilian population; that the Geneva Convention (Article 55 & 56) requires that any occupying power must restore the public health infrastructure and protections afforded to the civilian population to mitigate and prevent mortality and morbidity after any conflict or war; that this applies equally to post-sudden-onset natural disasters or public health emergencies of international concern necessary to protect the global health.
4. The accurate, transparent, and timely release of official public health information is necessary to identify risks, provide health alerts, and promote and protect global health.

References

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3. Burkle FM. Global health security demands a strong international health regulations treaty and leadership from a highly resourced World Health Organization. *Disaster Med Public Health Prep.* 2015;9(5):568-580.