

SRI LANKA

**Ensuring Continuity of Health Service Provision and Promoting Health
of Communities during Drought Situations: Circular Guidelines by
Ministry of Health**

N.W.A.N.Y. Wijsekara and T.T.S. Wickramaarachchi*

*Disaster Preparedness and Response Division, Ministry of Health, Nutrition
and Indigenous Medicine, 385, Rev. Baddegama Wimalawansa Thero
Mawatha, Colombo 10, Sri Lanka.*

**E-mail: thilinit@gmail.com*

Drought is a protracted emergency which affects many districts of Sri Lanka. Health care services offered by all levels of health care institutions both curative and preventive, should be continued uninterrupted during a period of drought. In addition, intensifying the service provision further, by implementing the specific interventions required to address special issues that arise during a season of drought is required in order to promote the health of communities during such a period. Even though circular guidelines are available for the provision of health services during disasters such as flood and landslides, no such guidance is available to address drought.

Objective of the exercise was to develop and disseminate a circular guideline for health staff for ensuring continuity of health service provision and promoting health of communities during drought situations. A consultative iterative process was used to obtain inputs from the relevant stakeholders within the health sector, on areas to be included for the circular. Agencies involved were Disaster Preparedness and Response Division, Family Health Bureau, Epidemiological Unit, Health Education Bureau and Nutrition Coordination Division. A draft circular was produced as a result of the deliberations. Comments of all agencies were incorporated into the circular guideline. The circular guideline for the health staff for ensuring continuity of health service provision and promoting health of communities during drought situations was developed. Above circular guideline, after being signed by the Director General of Health Services, was circulated to all the Provincial Directors of Health Services, Regional Directors of Health Services, Directors of Teaching/Provincial General Hospitals, Superintendents of District General

Hospitals / Base Hospitals, Medical Officers in Charge of Divisional Hospitals and all Medical Officers of Health.

Key areas of the circular included identification of vulnerable groups, possible health risks, general measures to be taken during drought, measures to be taken to ensure the continuity of health services during drought, provision of safe water, ensuring food security and nutritional status, prevention and control of communicable diseases, prevention of *Aedes* mosquito breeding in water storage containers during the drought, maternal and child health services during drought, child nutrition services during drought, blanket supplementation, maternal care during drought and areas which needs special attention.

Development and dissemination of a circular guideline by the Ministry of Health for ensuring continuity of health service provision and promoting health of communities during drought situations could be considered as a useful preliminary intervention to provide technical advice.

It is recommended to take concrete actions based on the recommendation of the circular guideline in anticipation and response to drought. Development and dissemination of a circular guidelines by the Ministry of Health for ensuring continuity of health service provision and promoting health of communities during drought situations could be recommended for other countries as well, depending on their own country specific circumstances.