



CBRN AWARENESS BRIEF FOR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Ensuring clarity, well-being and coordinated responsibilities in times of uncertainty

NOTE TO USERS

This brief is intended for National Societies in the Europe and Central Asia region, but it may also be used and adapted by other regions.

It compiles and summarizes key recommendations from existing guidance and frameworks related to:

- National Society Development (NSD)
- Care and protection of staff and volunteers
- MHPSS Movement Policy and Roadmap
- Duty of Care and Safer Access principles

Purpose:

To ensure a coordinated, informed, and protective approach across country operations in light of regional CBRN-related concerns, this brief supports the safety and emotional well-being of staff and volunteers by outlining core preparedness measures and consistent messaging.

Audience: All staff and volunteers working in or around affected and neighboring regions. Including focal points in HR, Volunteer Development, NSD, and MHPSS.

Why This Brief Matters

Amid increasing tensions in the Middle East and the potential for spillover effects into Europe, the risk of a Chemical, Biological, Radiological, or Nuclear (CBRN) incident, while currently unconfirmed, cannot be ruled out. Responsible preparedness is essential to safeguard staff, volunteers, and communities. At the same time, misinformation circulating on social media and messaging platforms can heighten fear, confusion, and inaction.

This brief aims to provide factual information, clarify roles and responsibilities, and strengthen trust in official guidance from the IFRC, your National Society, and, where applicable, national authorities. Coordination with national emergency systems and compliance with official public health or civil protection advisories are vital components of an effective response.

Understanding CBRN: What It Is, and What It Isn't

CBRN incidents refer to an event involving hazardous:

- **Chemicals** (e.g. toxic gas release from industrial sites or weapons),
- **Biological agents** (e.g. in release of bacteria or viruses),
- **Radiological materials** (e.g. radiation from damaged sources),
- **Nuclear material** (e.g. fallout from a weapon or reactor incident).



Events may result from warfare, terrorism, sabotage, or accidents. While rare, they can cause severe harm. Preparedness saves lives.

Common Questions Answered

1. Is there a current CBRN event?
No. At the time of writing, there is no confirmed CBRN event in the region. IFRC is operating under a preparedness framework, monitoring risks in coordination with relevant partners.
2. Are we actually in danger of a nuclear (or other CBRN) incident at the moment?
There is no immediate or confirmed threat to our region. While global tensions, including in the Middle East, are being monitored, our role is to stay prepared, not alarmed.
Preparing does not mean a crisis is expected. It simply ensures we can respond safely and effectively if needed, while continuing to serve our communities with confidence and care. We rely on verified sources and guidance from authorities to assess risks and take appropriate action. If anything changes, you will be informed through official IFRC and/or NS channels.
3. Why is everyone suddenly talking about radiation, chemicals, and iodine tablets?
In volatile situations, rumors spread quickly. Some refer to legitimate concerns (e.g. the potential for escalation), while others are false or exaggerated. Our role is to stay grounded in facts, not fear.
4. Should I be taking iodine tablets now?
 - Absolutely not. Iodine tablets should only be taken under the guidance of public health authorities, and only in specific types of nuclear emergencies. They are effective only when taken at the right time and in the right context—taking them unnecessarily can be harmful.
 - The IFRC and your National Society will issue formal instructions if, and only if, public health authorities advise iodine distribution.
5. What should I do if I receive or see a rumour, especially in WhatsApp or on social media?
 - Do not share the message.
 - Note the rumour and inform your team leader or CBRN focal point.
 - If the rumour needs to be addressed, respond to it with the guidance of focal points not to damage the trust of communities.
 - Strengthen yourself with accurate information and encourage others to refer to official IFRC updates only.
6. What actions should I take now?
 - Familiarize yourself with basic protective actions like sheltering-in-place or evacuation protocols (to be provided by your team).

- Understand what a CBRN alert would look like from IFRC or local authorities.
 - Attend any briefings or exercises and ask questions.
7. How will I be warned if something happens?
- You will be alerted through official IFRC or National Society channels, such as WhatsApp, email, or directly via your team lead.
 - Where applicable, local or national authorities may also issue alerts through their official communication platforms (e.g., SMS, sirens, public announcements, or emergency apps).
 - Always follow information from trusted and verified sources, including your Red Cross/Red Crescent leadership and official government channels.
 - Avoid acting on social media rumours.
8. What happens if a CBRN incident actually happens?
- You will be informed through official channels. Clear, step-by-step guidance will be issued. You may be advised to:
- Evacuate the area,
 - Remain indoors with windows sealed (shelter-in-place),
 - Use personal protective equipment (PPE) if available and trained,
 - Support affected populations with essential humanitarian services once safe.
- All actions will follow IFRC protocols and in-country coordination with authorities.
9. How can I support my community?
- Be a voice of calm and truth. Help people:
- Understand what CBRN is (and is not), Ensure the accurate information about CBRN is shared with the staff and volunteers who are responsible for collecting and responding to feedback of communities.
 - Decide on your strategy to disseminate accurate information when necessary,
 - Identify the preferred communication channels of communities to disseminate timely and accurate information if necessary.
 - Use existing feedback channels to identify any rumours and misinformation which would cause harm.
 - Know how to respond (if needed),
 - Avoid panic and rumor-sharing.

You don't need to have all the answers, just point people to trusted sources (e.g. IFRC, Red Cross/Red Crescent, Ministry of Health/Civil Protection).

Your Safety and Well-being

The IFRC is committed to ensuring that all staff and volunteers are protected, respected, and supported before, during, and after any emergency. This commitment is grounded in the Volunteer Charter, the Duty of Care policy, Movement MHPSS policy and the Safer Access Framework.



You have the right to:

- Say no to unsafe or unclear tasks
- Receive clear instructions, protective equipment, and support
- Access Psychological First Aid (PFA) and peer support
- Take breaks, rest, and care for your mental and physical health
- Speak openly with your team leader or focal point

Caring for others starts with caring for yourself. You are not alone. Ask your team leader or MHPSS focal point about upcoming PFA sessions or support options.

Who is responsible and who to contact

Each National Society may have a different structure, but what matters most is that you know who to contact if you have questions or concerns about your safety and well-being. As part of preparedness, every team should have clear focal points in place. Below are general guidelines to help you identify who to reach out to:

- Staff well-being is typically coordinated by the Human Resources (HR) department. Make sure you know who your HR focal point is, this is the person you can speak to about any issues related to safety, duty of care, or psychosocial support at work.
- Volunteer well-being is usually led by the Volunteer Development or National Society Development (NSD) teams. For questions, support, or concerns, you can contact your volunteer focal point and the MHPSS Focal person.
- Psychosocial support systems are often developed jointly by HR and Volunteer Development, with technical guidance from MHPSS focal points. If you're feeling stressed or want to learn more about Psychological First Aid (PFA), this is who you should contact.
- CBRN preparedness and risk communication is led by your Operations or CBRN focal points, with support from Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA) and MHPSS teams. These focal points can guide you on how alerts will be shared, how to handle misinformation, and what actions to take.

Key Messages to Remember & Share

- No event with hazardous CBRN has occurred; this is about staying prepared, informed and connected
- Always follow official instructions. Avoid relying on rumors, social media, or unofficial channels.
- Do not self-medicate or distribute protective items unless clearly be instructed by the health authorities
- You are supported. Ask your supervisor or focal point if you feel unsure or need clarity.
- Decide on your strategy on how to disseminate timely and accurate information with communities if necessary.
- Decide on the tools and methodology on how you can capture rumours and misinformation and collect feedback (question, belief, complaint) of communities to ensure trust.



- Log any rumors or misinformation you hear in the feedback system and ensure responding to them with the guidance of your focal point. Raise them during daily debriefs so they can be addressed promptly.

Final Words

Staff and volunteers are the backbone of the humanitarian response. Your well-being, safety, and clarity are top priorities. This brief reflects our collective responsibility, across departments and technical teams, to support and protect you in preparedness and crises. If anything is unclear or you feel overwhelmed, ask questions and seek support. You are not alone. We are in this together.

For more information, you can consult the following resources:

- [MHPSS Movement Policy \(Council of Delegates, 2019\)](#)
- [Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Roadmap 2020–2023](#)
- [Guidelines for Caring for Staff and Volunteers in Crises \(IFRC, 2019\)](#)
- [IFRC Volunteering Policy \(2022\)](#)
- [Standards to facilitate the safety, security and well-being of volunteers. IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE](#)