



WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

FIFTY-SIXTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY
Provisional agenda item 14.16

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Revision of the International Health Regulations

Report by the Secretariat

1. The submission for international review of the first composite draft of the revised International Health Regulations coincided with recognition of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) as a new disease. Experiences during the response to SARS have highlighted some urgent needs for prevention of international spread of infectious diseases. These could be taken into account when the Health Assembly considers the draft resolution on International Health Regulations recommended by the Executive Board in resolution EB111.R13. That resolution is reproduced below, with amendments now suggested by the Director-General shown in bold.

ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

2. The Health Assembly may wish to consider the following draft resolution:

The Fifty-sixth World Health Assembly,

Recalling resolutions WHA48.7, WHA48.13, WHA54.14, and WHA55.16, which respond to the need to ensure global health security at a time when the threat of infectious diseases is resurging;

Taking into account also the existence of new risks and threats to health arising from the potential deliberate use of agents for terrorism purposes;

Affirming the additional threat posed by the substantial growth in international travel and trade, which provide greater opportunities for infectious diseases to evolve and spread;

Underscoring the continued importance of the International Health Regulations as an instrument for ensuring the maximum possible protection against the international spread of disease with minimum interference in international traffic;

Acknowledging the close links between the Regulations and WHO's outbreak alert and response activities, which have identified the principal challenges to be met in revising the Regulations;

Concerned that experiences following the emergence and rapid international spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) have given concrete expression to the magnitude of these challenges, the inadequacy of the current Regulations, and the urgent

need for WHO and its international partners to undertake specific actions not addressed by the Regulations,

1. EXPRESSES its satisfaction with the procedures and activities planned for finalizing the draft revised Regulations for adoption by the Fifty-eighth World Health Assembly in 2005;
2. DECIDES:
 - (1) in accordance with Rule 42 of its Rules of Procedure, to establish an intergovernmental working group open to all Member States to review and recommend a draft revision of the International Health Regulations for consideration by the Health Assembly under Article 21 of the WHO Constitution;
 - (2) that regional economic integration organizations constituted by sovereign States, Members of WHO, to which their Member States have transferred competence over matters governed by this resolution, including the competence to enter into international legally binding regulations, may participate, in accordance with Rule 55 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly, in the work of the intergovernmental working group referred to under paragraph (1);
3. URGES Member States:
 - (1) to give high priority to the work on the revision of the International Health Regulations and to provide resources and cooperation necessary to facilitate the progress of such work;
 - (2) **to establish immediately a national standing task force or equivalent group and, within it, to designate an official or officials having operational responsibilities and accessible at all times by telephone or electronic communication, to ensure the speed, particularly during emergencies, of both reporting to WHO and consultation with national authorities when urgent decisions must be made;**
4. REQUESTS the Director-General:
 - (1) **to take into account reports from sources other than official notifications, to validate these reports according to established epidemiological principles and, when necessary and after informing the government concerned, to alert the international community to the presence of a public health threat that may constitute a serious threat to neighbouring countries or to international health;**
 - (2) **to collaborate with national authorities to assess the severity of the threat and the adequacy of control measures and, when necessary and after informing the government concerned, to conduct on-the-spot studies by a WHO team, with the purpose of ensuring that appropriate control measures are being employed;**

5. FURTHER REQUESTS the Director-General:

- (1) to complete the technical work required to facilitate reaching agreement on the revised International Health Regulations;
- (2) to fully utilize technical consultations and electronic communications already in place to bring a text that has as much consensus as possible to the intergovernmental working group;
- (3) to keep Member States informed about the technical work on the revision of the Regulations through the regional committees and other mechanisms;
- (4) to convene the intergovernmental working group on revision of the International Health Regulations at the appropriate time and on the agreement of the Executive Board at its 113th session in January 2004, having regard to the progress achieved on the technical work and the other commitments of the Organization;
- (5) to facilitate the participation of the least developed countries in the work of any intergovernmental working group and in intergovernmental technical consultations;
- (6) to invite, as observers at the sessions of the intergovernmental working group on the revision of the International Health Regulations in accordance with Rule 48 of the Rules of Procedure of the World Health Assembly, representatives of non-Member States, of liberation movements referred to in resolution WHA27.37, of organizations of the United Nations system, of intergovernmental organizations with which WHO has established effective relations, and of nongovernmental organizations in official relations with WHO, who will attend the sessions of that body in accordance with the relevant Rules of Procedure and resolutions of the Health Assembly.

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