
Implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005)

Report by the Director-General

1. This document is submitted in response to resolution WHA61.2 (2008), and to decision WHA71(15) (2018), in which the Health Assembly requested the Director-General “to submit every year a single report to the Health Assembly on progress made in implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005), containing information provided by States Parties and details of the Secretariat’s activities, pursuant to paragraph 1 of Article 54 of the International Health Regulations (2005)”.

NATIONAL IHR FOCAL POINTS

2. The Secretariat has continued to facilitate round-the-clock communication between National IHR Focal Points and WHO’s IHR Contact Points. In 2023, 50% (99) of Focal Points updated their contact information. By 31 December 2023, the Event Information Site for National IHR Focal Points had 1067 country-designated users, of which 221 were new accounts. Consequently, the total number of Event Information Site users rose to 1810 intergovernmental organizations and members of the WHO workforce.

3. In 2023, WHO regional offices continued to support training and exchange of experience among National IHR Focal Points within their respective regions. For example, the first annual South-East Asia Regional Practice of All Hazard IHR Event Communication exercise was conducted to test Focal Point event communication capacity, facilitate learning and catalyse continuous improvement. In the African Region, Mauritius and South Sudan were supported to conduct national level training and onboarding for Focal Point staff.

EVENT NOTIFICATION, RISK ASSESSMENT AND INFORMATION SHARING BY WHO

4. The Secretariat receives and seeks information about public health events of potential international concern through a variety of sources. The Secretariat routinely requests verification of information on events detected through informal sources from the States Parties under Article 10 of the Regulations. Delays continued to be observed in 2023 in relation to notification and verification under Articles 6 and 10.

5. In 2023, the Secretariat posted 87 event updates on the secure Event Information Site, relating to 47 country-specific public health events. Most event updates concerned influenza due to identified avian or animal influenza virus (29), measles (7), Marburg virus disease (6) and cholera (4). In addition, 44 announcements were published on the Event Information Site, mainly relating to additional health

measures in response to multi-country events, including coronavirus disease (COVID-19) (10), medical product alerts (8), poliovirus (7), monkeypox/mpox (6), and dengue (4).

6. Further in-depth epidemiological updates were provided through situation reports for COVID-19 (39 updates), mpox (19 situation reports) and a multi-country outbreak of cholera (nine situation reports). The Secretariat also published 67 updates on new and ongoing events as disease outbreak news¹ in 2023, related to 51 events in 39 countries, and seven events that involved multiple countries.

IHR COMMITTEES

Emergency Committees

7. The IHR Emergency Committee concerning ongoing events and context involving transmission and international spread of poliovirus continued to meet on a quarterly basis. Following its thirty-eighth meeting on 20 March 2024, the Director-General, on the advice of the Committee, maintained the status of a public health emergency of international concern and issued revised temporary recommendations.

8. The IHR Emergency Committee for COVID-19 met twice in 2023. Following its fifteenth meeting on 4 May 2023, the Director-General, on the advice of the Committee, determined that the COVID-19 pandemic no longer constituted a public health emergency of international concern and issued revised temporary recommendations.² In its deliberations, the Committee suggested that the Director-General consider convening an IHR Review Committee to advise on standing recommendations for long-term risks posed by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 taking into account the 2023–2025 COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan.³

9. The IHR Emergency Committee on the multicountry outbreak of mpox met twice in 2023. Following its fifth meeting on 10 May 2023, on the advice of the Committee, the Director-General determined that the event no longer constituted a public health emergency of international concern, and issued revised temporary recommendations. In its deliberations, the Committee advised that standing recommendations would now be a more appropriate tool to manage the immediate, short and long-term public health risks posed by mpox.

Review committees

10. The Review Committee regarding amendments to the Regulations conducted its work from 6 October 2022 to 15 January 2023. On 6 February 2023, in accordance with decision WHA75(9) (2022), the Director-General transmitted the final report of the Committee to the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005).⁴

¹ See <https://www.who.int/emergencies/disease-outbreak-news> (accessed 5 April 2024).

² See [https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-\(2005\)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-\(covid-19\)-pandemic](https://www.who.int/news/item/05-05-2023-statement-on-the-fifteenth-meeting-of-the-international-health-regulations-(2005)-emergency-committee-regarding-the-coronavirus-disease-(covid-19)-pandemic) Statement on the fifteenth meeting of the IHR (2005) Emergency Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic (accessed 28 February 2024).

³ See <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-WHE-SPP-2023.1>. From emergency response to long-term COVID-19 disease management: sustaining gains made during the COVID-19 pandemic (accessed 29 February 2024).

⁴ Document A/WGIHR/2/5.

11. The Review Committee regarding Standing Recommendations for COVID-19 met between 27 July and 2 August 2023.¹ On 9 August 2023, the Director-General issued corresponding standing recommendations to support States Parties in addressing the risk posed by COVID-19 during the transition from the response to a public health emergency of international concern to its management within broader disease prevention and control programmes. These standing recommendations are in effect for all States Parties until 30 April 2025. The recommendations are hereby submitted to the Health Assembly for consideration.²

12. The Review Committee regarding Standing Recommendations for mpox met between 27 July and 7 August 2023.³ On 21 August, the Director-General issued standing recommendations, based on scientific principles and evidence, considered necessary and appropriate to support States Parties in addressing the risk posed by mpox. These standing recommendations are in effect for all States Parties until 20 August 2024 and are hereby submitted to the Health Assembly for consideration.⁴

PUBLIC HEALTH CAPACITIES FOR IHR IMPLEMENTATION

13. In 2023, the Secretariat continued to provide the States Parties Self-assessment Annual Reporting tool in an electronic format. Ninety-nine per cent of States Parties (194 out of 196) submitted their report for 2023, the highest submission rate for such a reporting cycle since 2010, with a six-point increase from 2022 in the participation of different sectors in the reporting process (now 76 %). Up-to-date data for the 2023 cycle are available on WHO's electronic IHR States Parties Self-assessment Annual Reporting portal.⁵

14. Regional offices continued to provide support to States Parties to build their public health capacities for implementation of the Regulations, in line with the WHO IHR Monitoring and Evaluation Framework.

15. In the African Region, all countries submitted an IHR States Parties Self-assessment Annual Report for the seventh consecutive year. In 2023, 19 countries were supported in conducting 20 joint external evaluations; 14 in conducting after-action reviews of measles, Ebola virus disease, Marburg virus disease and COVID-19 outbreaks; five in completing intra-action reviews for COVID-19, cholera and nutritional and humanitarian crises; and 12 in taking forward 13 simulation exercises to test the functionality of their capacities and readiness for health emergencies. The first ever WHO – Inter-Parliamentary Union – African Parliamentary Conference on Strengthening Health Security Preparedness was held in November 2023.⁶ Finally, in collaboration with the headquarters Secretariat, the African Region conducted regional training of trainers on the Regulations for 25 experts from seven countries to strengthen national emergency preparedness and response capacities.

¹ See document A77/8 Add.1.

² See document A77/8 Add.2.

³ See document A77/8 Add.3.

⁴ See document A77/8 Add.4.

⁵ See e-SPAR platform (<https://extranet.who.int/e-spar/>, accessed 28 February 2024).

⁶ See <https://odage.ch/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/faq-avocats-et-rangers-a-geneve-2022-08-24.pdf> (accessed on 13 March 2024).

16. In the Region of the Americas, at the request of small island developing States, a meeting was held in Jamaica in May 2023 to analyse the 35 indicators for the 15 core capacities currently included in the IHR States Parties Self-assessment Annual Report and to determine whether they should be adapted to the context of these countries. A subregional meeting for Central America, Cuba and the Dominican Republic held in El Salvador in August 2023 focused on the IHR States Parties Self-assessment Annual Reporting capacity in relation to zoonotic diseases. Furthermore, the first regional simulation exercise in the Americas was conducted in the context of the Santiago 2023 Pan American Games to ensure the safety and well-being of athletes, spectators, and residents.

17. In the Eastern Mediterranean Region, all States Parties submitted IHR States Parties Self-assessment Annual Report for 2023. After-action reviews were conducted in Qatar, Sudan, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. Tabletop and simulation exercises were conducted in Bahrain and Somalia to test the capacities required by the Regulations. The Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen conducted their first joint external evaluations and developed their National Action Plans for Health Security. Iraq and Pakistan conducted a second round of external evaluations and Pakistan started to review and update its National Action Plan in December 2023.

18. In 2023, the European and South-East Asia Regions continued to support capacity-building in risk communication, community engagement, and infodemic management.¹

19. In the Western Pacific Region, technical support was provided to States Parties to conduct after-action reviews on the COVID-19 response, including in Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea and the Philippines. A subregional meeting was held for Pacific Island countries to build capacities for National IHR Focal Points and the IHR Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. Technical sessions were organized to support States Parties in preparing for and conducting voluntary joint external evaluations in 2023. Mongolia and Samoa completed evaluations in 2023. Needs and priorities identified through these evaluations are used in countries to develop National Action Plans for Health Security, guided by the new Asia Pacific Health Security Action Framework endorsed by the seventy-fourth Regional Committee for the Western Pacific.

POINTS OF ENTRY

20. The Secretariat continued to provide technical and capacity-building support in 2023 in relation to capacities at points of entry for preparedness, readiness and response to health emergencies. Five regional and subregional training sessions were jointly organized by the WHO regional offices for South-East Asia and Europe, and by headquarters to assess capacities and improve cross-border collaboration. Furthermore, eight national assessments and trainings were carried out across six regions focusing on ship inspection as well as on assessments and contingency planning at points of entry.

21. Since 2007, 113 of a total of 152 coastal States Parties and four landlocked States Parties with inland ports have sent WHO the list of ports authorized to issue ship sanitation certificates, as required by the Regulations. The total number of authorized ports is now 1993.

22. The Secretariat continued its efforts to foster collaboration through the Joint Action Group, involving eight international transport organizations and federations.

¹ See <https://www.who.int/nepal/news/detail/11-05-2023-regional-workshop-to-strengthen-risk-communication-and-community-engagement-held> (accessed 11 March 2024).

ADDITIONAL HEALTH MEASURES

23. During the first half of 2023, the Secretariat continued to monitor States Parties' compliance regarding additional health measures in relation to COVID-19. In accordance with Article 43 of the Regulations, the Secretariat shared information about these measures with all States Parties through four updates published on the secure platform of the Event Information Site. The measures included COVID-19 testing and vaccination requirements. As of 2 August 2023,¹ seven countries required testing for all passengers prior to or on arrival and 28 countries required testing for non-vaccinated travellers.

STATES PARTIES AT RISK OF YELLOW FEVER TRANSMISSION AND COUNTRY VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

24. Information about States Parties' requirements for vaccination against yellow fever is collected annually through a survey sent by the Secretariat to all States Parties. The Secretariat also publishes WHO's recommendations for international travellers on vaccination for yellow fever, poliomyelitis and on malaria prophylaxis. The information is traditionally published in the International Travel and Health publication.²

25. In 2023, 149 States Parties, covering 37 States Parties' territories, completed the survey. Based on the results, 117 States Parties and their territories currently request a certificate of vaccination against yellow fever for all or specific subgroups of incoming travellers. In 2023, 42 States Parties, covering 16 States Parties' territories, confirmed that international certificates of vaccination against yellow fever, using WHO-approved vaccines, are now accepted as valid for the life of the person vaccinated, in accordance with Annex 7 of the Regulations, as amended³

CONCLUSION

26. Discussions on the proposed amendments to the Regulations, in accordance with their relevant provisions and decisions EB150(3) (2022) and WHA75(9), continued in 2023.

27. The amendments to Articles 55, 59, 61, 62 and 63 of the Regulations, adopted by the Seventy-fifth World Health Assembly through resolution WHA75.12 (2022), will enter into force on 31 May 2024. As communicated to all States Parties, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, New Zealand and Slovakia notified the Director-General of their rejection of the above-referenced amendments.

¹ Since the expiry of the IHR Temporary Recommendations in relation to COVID-19 on 4 August 2023, no further updates have been published on the Event Information Site for National IHR Focal Points.

² See <https://www.who.int/health-topics/travel-and-health> and <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241580472> (accessed 9 February 2024).

³ See resolution WHA67.13 (2014) on implementation of the International Health Regulations (2005).

ACTION BY THE HEALTH ASSEMBLY

28. The Health Assembly is invited to note this report, to consider the standing recommendations for COVID-19 and mpox contained in documents A77/8 Add.1 and A77/8 Add.2, in accordance with Article 53(g) of the Regulations and to provide guidance on the following question:

- How can WHO Member States continue to strengthen implementation of the Regulations, including pending the entry into force of any amendments to the Regulations that may be adopted by this Health Assembly?

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