

Breakthrough in Member State Talks on Amending the International Health Regulations (IHR)



Countries to meet next week on the few remaining issues in lead-up to Seventy-seventh World Health Assembly

In an historic milestone for global public health, State Parties today agreed in principle on a large, ground-breaking package of amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005). These amendments build on over 300 proposals made by countries in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. They set out to improve the ability of countries to prepare for, detect and respond to Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEICs), and will be part of a package to be put forward to the World Health Assembly (WHA). The [WHA takes place from 27 May–1 June 2024](#). Negotiators will meet again next week to wrap up their work on the few remaining issues that need to be finalised.

The IHR, which were first adopted by the World Health Assembly in 1969 and last revised in 2005, were conceived to maximize collective efforts to manage public health events while at the same time minimizing their disruption to travel and trade. They have 196 State Parties, comprising all 194 WHO Member States plus Liechtenstein and the Holy See. These Parties have led the process to amend the IHR through the [Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations \(2005\)](#) (WGIHR). Today marked the end of the [resumed session of the eighth meeting of the WGIHR](#).

This process has been running in parallel to an [intergovernmental process to develop an international agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response](#). The draft pandemic agreement, with its own Member State-led negotiating process which resumes on 20 May, is also due to go to the World Health Assembly.

“The International Health Regulations have served the world well for nearly 20 years but our collective experience in using this vital tool for the management of multiple public health emergencies, including the COVID-19 pandemic, has demonstrated important areas in which they could be strengthened for the benefit of all 196 State Parties,” said Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO Director-General. “This is historic. Countries have come together around improved international mechanisms to protect every person in the world and future generations from the impact of epidemics and pandemics, with a commitment to equity and solidarity. I thank all the Member States for their unwavering dedication.”

WGIHR Co-Chair Dr Ashley Bloomfield, of New Zealand, said: “It has been a long but very productive and gratifying process to achieve consensus on the majority of the proposed amendments. This shows the importance the world places on being able to prepare effectively for and respond better to epidemic and pandemic threats, and that there is strong international consensus on how to go about international public health protection.”

Fellow WGIHR Co-Chair, Dr Abdullah Assiri, of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, said: “Amending the International Health Regulations reflects the critical need to bolster our collective defences against current and future public health risks, all whilst firmly adhering to the principle of national sovereignty and respecting equity. Today, we have coalesced around a robust set of amendments which will make international cooperation more effective and easier to implement.”

A potential new pandemic agreement and the amended IHRs would be complementary international instruments designed and negotiated by Member States to help countries protect their peoples better from future pandemic threats. The IHRs focus on building countries’ capacities to detect and respond to public health events which could take on international dimensions, whilst the draft pandemic accord focuses on a coordinated international response to pandemics, with equitable access to vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics at the centre.

Source & Image Credit: [WHO](#)

Published on : Sat, 18 May 2024