

Prerequisites for Future Pandemic Prevention



As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to batter lives and livelihoods, experts are warning about future pandemics – which can spread more rapidly and inflict more damage – unless the global approach to dealing with infectious diseases shifts from reaction to prevention.

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"The risk of pandemics is increasing rapidly, with more than five new diseases emerging in people every year, any one of which has the potential to spread and become pandemic," the experts note in a [report](#) released following an urgent workshop on biodiversity and pandemics convened by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES).

The increased pandemic risk, say the 22 leading experts from around the world, is linked to degradation of nature caused by deforestation, agricultural intensification, wildlife trade and consumption, etc. Such unsustainable exploitation of the environment disrupts natural interactions among wildlife and their microbes, increasing contact between wildlife, livestock, pathogens and people. "This is the path to pandemics," according to Dr Peter Daszak, President of EcoHealth Alliance and Chair of the IPBES workshop.

It should be noted that COVID-19, similar to other health pandemics in the past, has its origins in microbes carried by animals. It is estimated that another 1.7 million currently 'undiscovered' viruses exist in mammals and birds – of which up to 850,000 could have the ability to infect people.

In order to mitigate pandemic risks, the experts call for reducing the human activities that drive the loss of biodiversity and implementing measures to prevent exploitation of high biodiversity regions. These preventive measures will reduce wildlife-livestock-human contact and help prevent the spillover of new diseases, the experts explain.

"We have the increasing ability to prevent pandemics – but the way we are tackling them right now largely ignores that ability," Dr Daszak points out. "Our approach has effectively stagnated – we still rely on attempts to contain and control diseases after they emerge, through vaccines and therapeutics. We can escape the era of pandemics, but this requires a much greater focus on prevention in addition to reaction."

In the report, the experts highlight that the cost of reducing risks to prevent pandemics could be 100 times less than the cost of responding to such pandemics. This consideration provides "strong economic incentives for transformative change," says the report, which offers a number of policy options intended to reduce and address pandemic risk. These policy options include:

- Launching a high-level intergovernmental council on pandemic prevention to provide decision-makers with the best science and evidence on emerging diseases; predict high-risk areas; evaluate the economic impact of potential pandemics; and highlight research gaps.
- Institutionalising the 'One Health' approach in national governments to build pandemic preparedness, enhance pandemic prevention programmes, and investigate and control outbreaks across sectors.
- Developing and incorporating pandemic and emerging disease risk health impact assessments in major development and land-use projects, while reforming financial aid for land-use so that benefits and risks to biodiversity and health are recognised and explicitly targeted.
- Ensuring that the economic cost of pandemics is factored into consumption, production, and government policies and budgets.
- Enabling changes to reduce the types of consumption, globalised agricultural expansion, and trade that have led to pandemics – this could include taxes or levies on meat consumption, livestock production and other forms of high pandemic-risk activities.
- Closing critical knowledge gaps such as those about key risk behaviours, the relative importance of illegal, unregulated, and the legal and

regulated wildlife trade in disease risk, and improving understanding of the relationship between ecosystem degradation and restoration, landscape structure and the risk of disease emergence.

The workshop report and its recommendations will offer decision-makers new insights into pandemic risk reduction and options for prevention, according to Dr Anne Larigauderie, Executive Secretary of IPBES.

Source: [IPBES](#)

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