

International Health Regulations

Background

The International Health Regulations (IHR) represent a joint agreement between 196 countries, including all World Health Organization (WHO) member states, to work together for global health security. The IHR help countries prevent, detect and rapidly respond to public health risks, irrespective of origin or source, that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide. The IHR utilize a multisectoral approach to engage all relevant authorities contributing to the detection, assessment and response to potential public health events of international concern.

Benefits to countries

- **Health threats have no borders:** The IHR strengthen countries' abilities to control diseases that cross borders at ports, airports and ground crossings.
- **Travel and trade made safer:** The IHR promote trade and tourism in countries and prevent economic damage caused by disease outbreaks.
- **Global health security is enhanced:** The IHR establish an early warning system not only for diseases but for anything biological and other threats to human health and livelihoods.
- **Daily threats are kept under control:** The IHR guide countries to detect, assess and respond to threats and inform other countries quickly.
- **All sectors benefit:** The IHR prepare all sectors for potential emergencies through coordination and information sharing.



IHR scope

- **Notification:** The IHR promote and facilitate information sharing between WHO and state parties. They require states to notify WHO of all events that may constitute a public health emergency of international concern and to respond to requests for verification of information regarding such events.
- **Focal points:** The IHR require state parties to designate a national IHR focal point and WHO to designate regional IHR contact points, all of whom must be available on a 24-hours-a-day basis, seven days a week.
- **Core capabilities:** State parties are required to develop, strengthen and maintain core public health capacities for surveillance and response by using existing national resources, such as the national plans for influenza pandemic preparedness.
- **Recommended measures:** WHO's response to a public health emergency of international concern will include temporary recommendations concerning appropriate public health responses, and may include recommended measures for application by the state affected by such an emergency, as well as by other states and by operators of international transport.

Additional resources

For additional information about the IHR, please visit the following sites:

- WHO IHR portal: www.who.int/ihr
- Ten things you need to do to implement the IHR: www.who.int/ihr/about/10things/en

- IHR FAQ: www.who.int/ihr/about/FAQ2009.pdf