



## THE CURRENT US EXIT FROM WHO AND ITS IMPLICATIONS: GS - II



The announcement of the United States' withdrawal from the World Health Organization (WHO) has sent ripples across the global health landscape. Signed into action by then-President Donald Trump, this decision, based on criticisms of the WHO's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, has profound implications for global health initiatives. While WHO's chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus has expressed regret over this decision, it underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of WHO's history, significance, and role in addressing global health crises.



## History of WHO

The World Health Organization, a specialized agency of the United Nations, was established on April 7, 1948. Its creation was rooted in the global realization that health challenges transcended national borders. WHO's initial focus included eradicating diseases like smallpox, improving maternal and child health, and addressing nutrition deficits. Over the decades, WHO's work has evolved, tackling modern health threats such as pandemics, non-communicable diseases, and health inequities.

One of WHO's most celebrated achievements is the eradication of smallpox in 1980, a milestone in public health that demonstrated the power of global cooperation. The organization has since spearheaded campaigns against polio, malaria, and HIV/AIDS, while also working to strengthen health systems worldwide.

## Significance of WHO

WHO plays a critical role in global health governance. It serves as a platform for nations to collaborate on health policies, share critical data, and coordinate responses to health emergencies. The agency's expertise in disease surveillance, vaccine deployment, and research has been instrumental in addressing threats such as Ebola, Zika virus, and COVID-19.

WHO's influence extends beyond immediate health crises. Its work in setting international health standards, such as regulating pharmaceutical products and creating guidelines for food safety, ensures consistency and safety in global health practices. Furthermore, WHO's advocacy for universal health coverage promotes equitable access to healthcare, a cornerstone of sustainable development.

## Role of WHO in COVID-19 Vaccination

During the COVID-19 pandemic, WHO demonstrated its pivotal role by launching the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, which included the COVAX initiative. COVAX was designed to ensure equitable vaccine distribution, particularly to low- and middle-income countries. While wealthier nations secured bilateral vaccine deals, WHO's efforts prevented many vulnerable populations from being left behind.

Through its collaboration with governments, health organizations, and vaccine manufacturers, WHO facilitated the delivery of millions of vaccine doses worldwide. Despite challenges, this initiative underscored the agency's commitment to global solidarity in addressing health crises.

## India and WHO: A Strong Partnership

India has maintained a robust relationship with WHO, both as a beneficiary and contributor. WHO has supported India in eradicating polio, improving maternal health, and addressing



tuberculosis. India, in turn, has played a pivotal role in WHO's initiatives, leveraging its vast pharmaceutical industry to produce affordable medicines and vaccines for global distribution.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, India emerged as a critical partner for WHO. The Serum Institute of India, one of the world's largest vaccine manufacturers, supplied millions of doses to COVAX. This collaboration highlighted the symbiotic relationship between India and WHO in promoting global health.

## Implications of US Exit from WHO

The United States has historically been the largest donor to WHO, contributing approximately 15% of its total budget. The withdrawal of such a significant financial supporter poses challenges for WHO's operations. This decision could lead to funding shortages, forcing WHO to scale back critical programs, including those related to disease surveillance, emergency response, and vaccine development.

The US exit also weakens global health cooperation. WHO relies on member states for information sharing, which is vital for monitoring and responding to health threats. Without the US's participation, there could be gaps in data collection and dissemination, potentially delaying responses to emerging diseases.

Moreover, this decision sends a message about the fragility of global solidarity in addressing shared challenges. It risks creating a precedent where countries prioritize national interests over collective action, undermining the multilateralism essential for addressing transnational health crises.

## Conclusion

The US exit from WHO marks a significant moment in global health history, highlighting the intersection of politics and public health. While WHO has pledged to adapt to this challenge by prioritizing critical activities and seeking alternative funding sources, the decision underscores the importance of sustained commitment to global health.

As the world continues to grapple with health threats like COVID-19, bird flu, and antimicrobial resistance, WHO's role remains indispensable. The organization's history and contributions serve as a reminder of the power of collaboration in safeguarding global health. Countries like India demonstrate how partnerships with WHO can yield significant benefits, not only for national health but for the world at large.

## MAIN PRACTICE QUESTION

**Analyze the implications of the United States' withdrawal from the World**



**Health Organization (WHO) on global health initiatives, with particular emphasis on funding, data sharing, and multilateral cooperation. (250 words)**

## **Answer Guidelines:**

**1. Introduction (30-40 words):**

Briefly introduce the significance of the US as WHO's largest donor and its historical role in global health governance.

**2. Impact on Funding (50-60 words):**

- Discuss the funding gap created by the US withdrawal.
- Highlight how it affects WHO's ability to conduct disease surveillance, vaccination programs, and emergency response.

**3. Impact on Data Sharing (50-60 words):**

- Explain the potential disruption in global health intelligence, particularly in detecting and responding to emerging health threats.
- Mention specific examples, like challenges posed by diseases such as H5N1 or COVID-19.

**4. Impact on Multilateral Cooperation (50-60 words):**

- Emphasize the weakening of global solidarity in health crises.
- Discuss how this decision might set a precedent for other nations, undermining WHO's authority and ability to lead collective action.

**5. Conclusion (30-40 words):**

Stress the need for continued global cooperation, the significance of WHO in ensuring health security, and the hope for a reassessment of the decision to restore collective action.

The hope remains that the United States will reconsider its position, recognizing that health security is a collective responsibility. Regardless of this decision, the global community must rally behind WHO, ensuring it remains equipped to address the pressing health challenges of today and tomorrow.