

# 1. Pandemic Emergency - Health

The 194 member states of the World Health Organization (WHO) amended the International Health Regulations (IHR) in June 2024, which came into force in September 2025, introducing a new legal category called pandemic emergency.

## Pandemic Emergency

A "pandemic emergency" is defined as a public health emergency of international concern caused by a communicable disease that -

1. Has, or is at high risk of having, wide geographical spread to and within multiple States;
2. Is exceeding, or is at high risk of exceeding, the capacity of health systems to respond in those States;
3. Is causing, or is at high risk of causing, serious social and/or economic disruption, including disruption to international traffic and trade;
4. Requires rapid, equitable, and enhanced coordinated international action, with whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches.

## International Health Regulations (IHR)

They are international legal instruments that govern how countries prevent and respond to the cross-border spread of disease and other public health risks. The regulations are binding on 196 countries, including all 194 Member States of the WHO.

Under the IHR, countries known as "States Parties" have specific rights and obligations. These include

1. **Surveillance and detection** - Countries must build and maintain the capacity to detect, assess, report, and respond to public health events.
2. **National focal points** - Each country must designate a "National IHR Focal Point" to serve as the official contact for all communications with the WHO.
3. **Reporting requirements** - Countries must report specific diseases and any potential public health emergencies of international concern (PHEIC) to the WHO within 24 hours of assessment.
4. **Public health emergencies of international concern (PHEIC)** - Provide a framework for the WHO Director-General to declare a PHEIC, an extraordinary event that poses a public health risk and requires a coordinated international response.

### INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS (IHR)

– from policy to people's health security

#### What are the IHR?

The IHR are legally binding and help countries work together to protect lives threatened by the spread of diseases and other health risks, including radiation and chemical hazards.



#### 5 reasons why the IHR matter

 <h5>HEALTH THREATS HAVE NO BORDERS</h5> <p>The IHR strengthen countries' abilities to control diseases that cross borders at ports, airports and ground crossings</p>	 <h5>TRAVEL AND TRADE ARE MADE SAFER</h5> <p>The IHR promote trade and tourism in countries and prevent economic damage</p>	 <h5>GLOBAL HEALTH SECURITY IS ENHANCED</h5> <p>The IHR establish an early warning system not only for diseases but for anything that threatens human health and livelihoods</p>	 <h5>DAILY THREATS ARE KEPT UNDER CONTROL</h5> <p>The IHR guide countries to detect, assess and respond to threats and inform other countries quickly</p>	 <h5>ALL SECTORS BENEFIT</h5> <p>The IHR prepare all sectors for potential emergencies through coordination and information sharing</p>
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World Health Organization  
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR Europe

Until all sectors are on board with the IHR, no country is ready

[www.euro.who.int/ihr](http://www.euro.who.int/ihr)

## Key Changes in the 2024 IHR Amendments

1. **Introduction of "Pandemic Emergency"** - Creates a tiered alert system (PHEIC as the base, pandemic emergency as the highest alert) to trigger a more urgent and coordinated international response for the most severe threats.
2. **Commitment to Equity and Solidarity** - Amendments legally enshrine principles of equity, obligating WHO and member states to ensure fair access to health products like vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments during health emergencies.
3. **Coordinating Financial Mechanism** - A new mechanism will be established to help developing countries in building and maintaining the core public health capacities required by the IHR.
4. **States Parties Committee** - A committee of member states will be created to facilitate the effective implementation of the regulations.
5. **Respect for National Sovereignty** - Amendments state that Countries retain full sovereignty to implement public health measures based on their national laws and contexts.

## Significance of the New Approach

1. **Enhanced Speed and Clarity** - Clear definition of a pandemic emergency aims to prevent delays in declaration and response, as seen during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. **Addressing Inequity** - By focusing on equitable access to health products and establishing a financial mechanism, the amendments aim to reduce disparities between developed and developing nations.
3. **Strengthened Global Collaboration** - Creation of national authorities and a dedicated States Parties Committee promotes better coordination to ensure that preparedness is a continuous and collaborative effort.
4. **Building Resilience** - By focusing on strengthening core capacities everywhere, the new rules aim to build a more resilient global health system capable of resisting the shock of future pandemics.

## Conclusion

The adoption of the IHR amendments strengthens global pandemic preparedness, but effective implementation requires sustained political will and financial investment. Strong commitment and resources will ensure these obligations translate into tangible protection against future health threats.

Source - <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/health/new-definition-of-pandemic-emergency-enters-global-health-dictionary/article70112634.ece>