

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS (2005)

The 2003 SARS epidemic exposed the lack of global capacity for infectious disease detection, prevention, and control, prompting the World Health Organization (WHO) and its Member States to revise the International Health Regulations (IHR) to better address acute public health risks that threaten people worldwide. The IHR (2005) is a legally binding agreement signed by 194 Member States that commits them to develop and maintain capacity to find, rapidly stop, and prevent disease outbreaks and other public health threats, and to report these events to WHO.

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

- **Core capacities:** Countries must develop, strengthen, and maintain core public health capacities for the surveillance of and response to disease threats, including at airports, ports, and ground crossings. These include tested contingency plans, reliable laboratories, functional emergency operations centers, effective risk communications, trained and staffed rapid response teams, and appropriate infection control and case management procedures at health facilities.
- **Notification:** Through a network of designated IHR focal points, countries must notify WHO within 24 hours of all events that may constitute a public health emergency of international concern. Once notified, WHO supports rapid investigation and response.
- **Declaration of an international health emergency:** WHO may declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, provide recommendations for affected parties and coordinate a global response with relevant governments, the United Nations and others.

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