

Conceptual framework for public health and social measures in the context of infectious disease transmission

VERSION AS OF FEBRUARY 2024



World Health
Organization



Why is a conceptual framework for public health and social measures important?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, **inconsistencies in defining and categorizing public health and social measures (PHSM)** hampered policy monitoring, research and communication efforts.



To address this, WHO and partners developed **a conceptual framework for PHSM to harmonize the understanding and language** used to describe how they work during health emergencies.

The PHSM conceptual framework aims to:



- Guide **coordinated, interdisciplinary research** on PHSM effectiveness, unintended consequences and uptake and adherence.



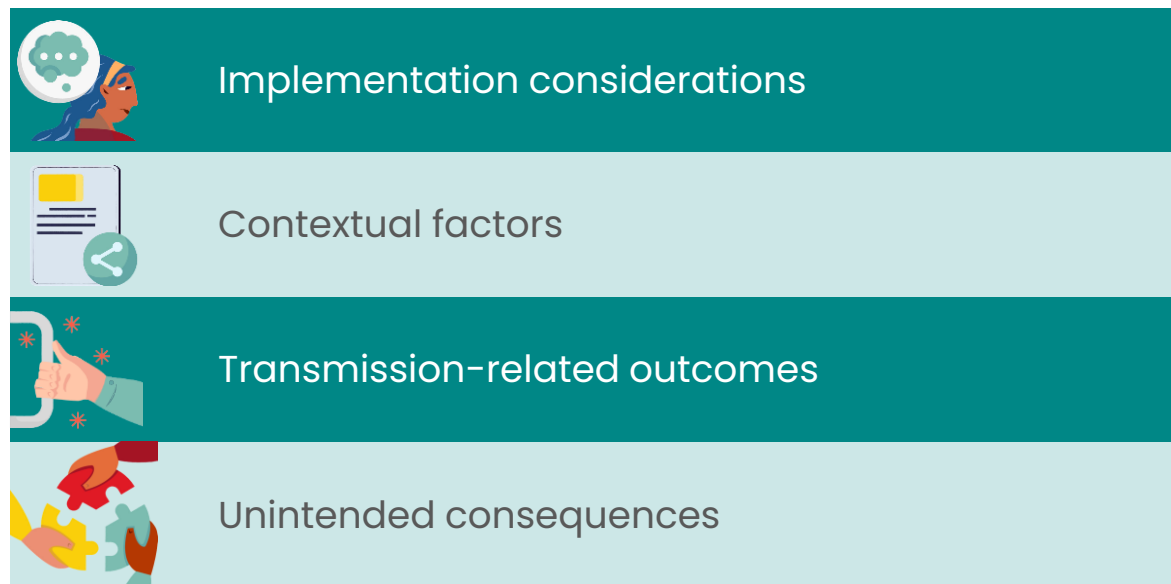
- Facilitate coherent, **comparable PHSM policy monitoring.**



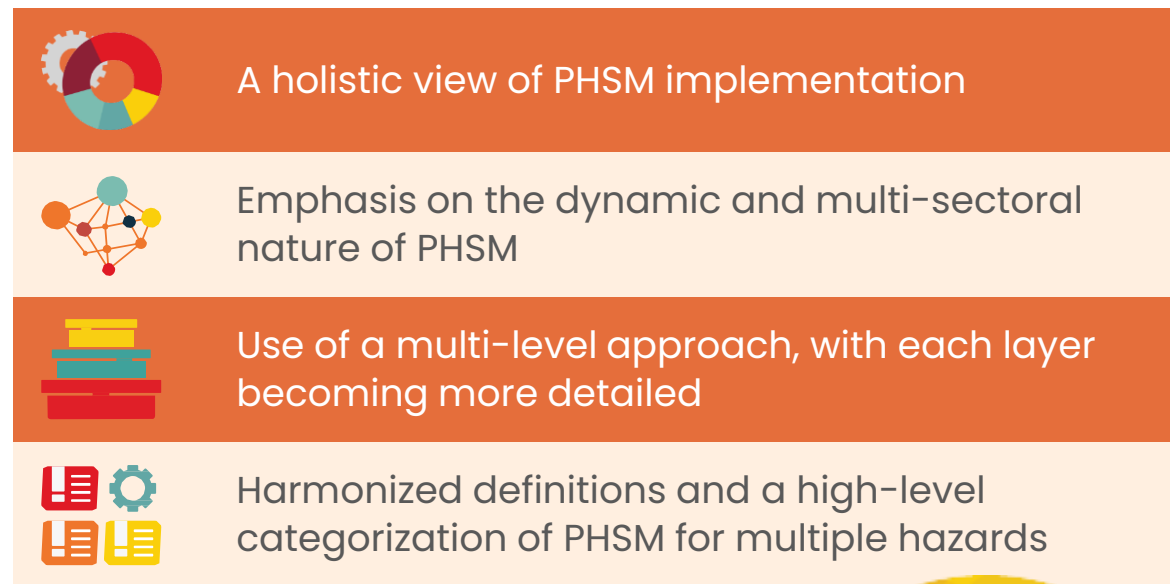
- Inform equitable, balanced and context specific **PHSM decision-making and implementation.**

What is the PHSM conceptual framework?

The PHSM conceptual framework applies a “complex systems lens” to describe:



Principles underlying the framework:



The framework is the conceptual basis for a suite of tools to support PHSM decision-making, monitoring and research developed under the umbrella of the [WHO Initiative to measure effectiveness and impact of public health and social measures during health emergencies](#).



How was the PHSM conceptual framework developed?



1

Initial draft*:

- Developed by WHO and the University of Munich
- Based on a review of existing taxonomies and frameworks
- Applied COVID-19 as a use case

2

Iterative consultation:

- Involved PHSM experts from academia, policy and practice
- Workshop at the [“Building coalitions for strengthening PHSM”](#) meeting
- Feedback from PHSM focal points at WHO

3

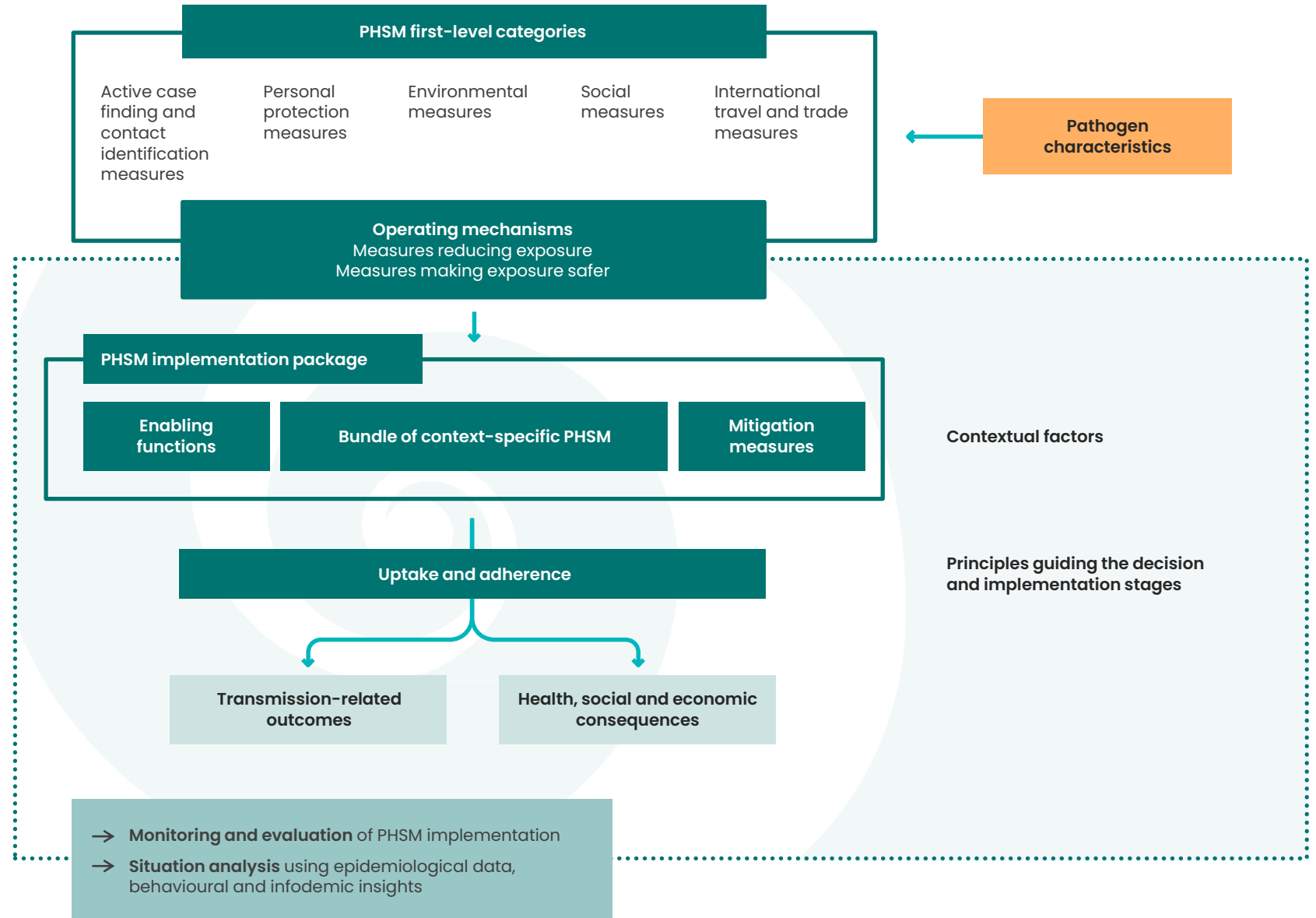
Continued adjustments:

- Treated as a living document to reflect emerging insights and developments

*Rehfuess EA, Movsisyan A, Pfadenhauer LM, et al. Public health and social measures during health emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic: an initial framework to conceptualize and classify measures. Influenza Other Respir Viruses. 2023;17:e13110. <https://doi.org/10.1111/irv.13110>.

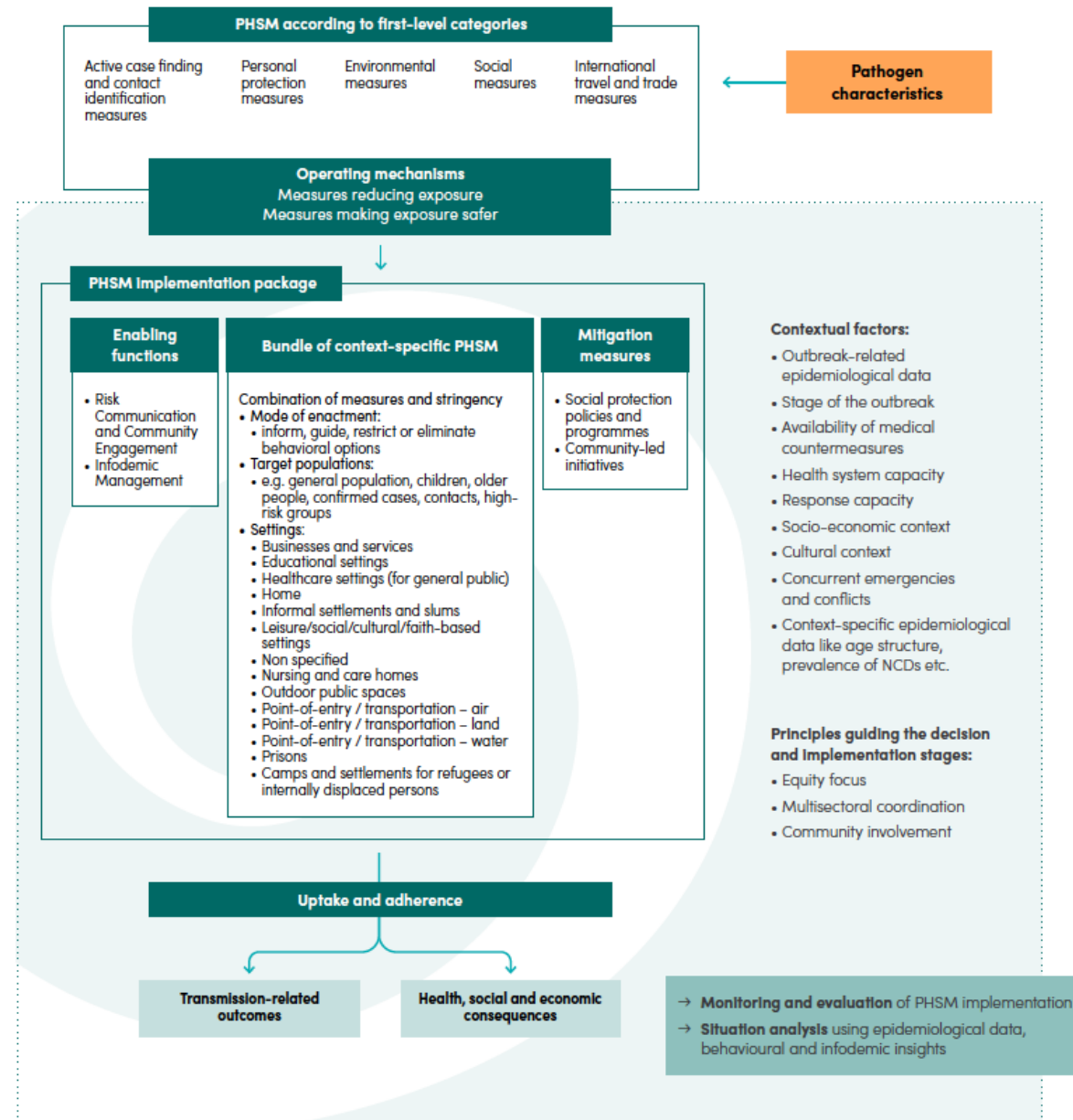
Updated conceptual framework for public health and social measures

FIRST LEVEL



Updated conceptual framework for public health and social measures

SECOND LEVEL



Categories of public health and social measures

First-level PHSM category	Definition	Examples
Active case-finding and contact identification measures	Systems and actions implemented to identify, track and manage potential and confirmed cases of disease; these may include case-finding, testing and contact tracing, as well as isolation (i.e. to separate individuals with a confirmed or suspected infection) and quarantine (i.e. to separate individuals at high risk of infection from those who are likely to already be infected)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Testing • Screening • Isolation • Quarantine
Personal protection measures	Measures comprising the use of personal protective equipment as well as specific behaviours that reduce the risk of individuals transmitting the disease or becoming infected with a pathogen with epidemic or pandemic potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hand hygiene • Respiratory etiquette • Condom use • Safe food handling • Bednet use
Environmental measures	Measures targeting the physical infrastructure/environment including the human-animal interface through modifications, re-purposing and/or appropriately maintaining existing or newly set up structures to limit transmission of a pathogen with epidemic or pandemic potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ventilation • Surface cleaning • Water and sanitation measures • Solid waste management • Window and door screens
Social measures	Measures at national and subnational levels comprising (i) modifications to social interactions between individuals and groups of people; (ii) adaptation, cancellation or modifications to the timing of services or activities; and (iii) adaptations or restrictions to movement within and between specific settings and within or across national borders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical distancing • Modification of mass gatherings • School measures • Business measures • Domestic movement restrictions
International travel and trade measures	Measures that use a risk-based approach to reduce the travel- and trade-associated exportation, importation and onward transmission of a pathogen with epidemic or pandemic potential across borders ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel advice • Entry and exit screening • Quarantine on arrival • Travel bans • Testing before departure and upon arrival

^a Technical considerations for implementing a risk-based approach to international travel in the context of COVID-19: interim guidance, 2 July 2021. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021 (<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-2019-nCoV-Risk-based-international-travel-2021.1>, accessed 15 September 2023).



Learn more:

Access the full “Building coalitions for strengthening PHSM” meeting report

→ [Click to view](#)

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