

THIRD OPEN MEETING OF THE REVIEW COMMITTEE ON THE FUNCTIONING OF THE INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS (2005) DURING THE COVID-19 RESPONSE

3 November 2020, Geneva, Switzerland

Report of the Third Open Meeting of the Review Committee on the Functioning of the International Health Regulations (2005) During the COVID-19 Response

Opening

The meeting opened at 12:10 Central European Time. Dr Michael Ryan, Executive Director, WHO Health Emergencies Programme, welcomed participants on behalf of the WHO Director General to the meeting and invited the Chair to update the participants on the progress of the Review Committee on the functioning of the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR).

Report of the Chair of the Review Committee

Dr Lothar Wieler, Chair of the IHR Review Committee, presented on the progress made by the Committee since the last open meeting. He highlighted the priority areas for review, the key questions and preliminary findings across the three subgroups on preparedness, alert and response. The Preparedness subgroup looks specifically at: 1) IHR core capacities assessment, monitoring and reporting; 2) pandemic preparedness planning; and 3) preparedness for an unexpected event. The Alert subgroup considers: 1) Notification, outbreak alert and verification; 2) risk assessment and provision of information; and 3) the Emergency Committee's working modalities, declaration of a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PEHIC), and possible intermediate level of alert. The Response subgroup considers: 1) Travel and trade restrictions; 2) collaboration and coordination; and 3) communication and information-sharing.

The preliminary findings of the Review Committee include:

- Both strong public health and health care systems are needed for effective pandemic response.
- Preparedness capacities need to be further examined considering the observed performance in the response of many States Parties; this includes tools as well as approaches and mechanisms for assessing and reporting.
- Multisectoral coordination and capacity to enable rapid response to all dangerous pathogens/diseases is needed for successful pandemic preparedness.
- Appropriate authority of National IHR Focal Points is critical to ensure rapid communication and coordination.
- Adequate national legislation needs to ensure sufficient support for health and non-health measures to detect, prevent and respond in line with the IHR.
- A universal peer-review mechanism such as that used in human rights may be useful for IHR core capacities assessment, monitoring and reporting.
- Generic national response plans covering more respiratory illnesses than influenza can strengthen pandemic preparedness.

- Official information as well information obtained through other channels, such as media and social media, are useful surveillance information. Digital technology can be useful to enhance efficiency, standardization and traceability of information collection and transparency.
- WHO-provided Rapid Risk Assessments are of utmost importance for informing response decisions.
- The meaning and consequences of Public Health Emergencies of International Concern have to be fully understood by Member States and international as well as supranational institutions. The relevance of an intermediate level of alert to prevent a PHEIC from occurring, and options for its implementation, need to be also clearly examined.
- The role of WHO in relation to travel recommendations as well as incentives for States Parties to comply with their obligations related to travel measures need to be further examined.
- Facilitating the development and implementation of strategies to ensure the rapid international sharing of essential specimens and information is key to efficient pandemic control.

Discussion

The meeting was attended by more than 80 States Parties, 5 UN agencies, and One State Party requested to make a presentation to a future meeting. The presentation was circulated to members of the Review Committee and the Chair invited the State Party to present at the next open meeting of the Committee.

Several States Parties announced that they will provide additional inputs to the Review Committee through the Secretariat, in the form of non-papers for individual or groups of countries.

Finally, further clarification was provided with regards to timelines for reporting to Member States: a Chair's Statement on progress was planned for the resumed World Health Assembly 73; an interim report for the Executive Board in January 2021, and a final report for the 74th World Health Assembly in May 2021, depending on the evolution of the pandemic. The Chair thanked the participants for their interventions and assured them that their comments would be carefully considered by the Review Committee.

The Chair closed the meeting at 13:07 Central European Time.