



STATEMENT

7th Meeting of the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005)

5 FEBRUARY 2024, GENEVA – The immediate sharing of SARS-CoV-2 pathogen data was core to the unprecedented speed of the COVID-19 response, which enabled the development of an effective vaccine in a record 236 days. We must preserve what worked well and ensure rapid access to public health data in pandemic situations.

In general, conditions or negotiations attached to pathogen-sharing risk causing significant delays in the development of medical countermeasures, as seen under certain national legislation implementing the Nagoya Protocol. Delays are not theoretical; they can lead to public health consequences. Since 2018, vaccine manufacturers have reported lags of three weeks to nine months in accessing seasonal influenza samples. Similar obstacles have arisen with Zika, mpox, and Ebola. For SARS-CoV-2, a delay of just one month could have resulted in an additional 400,000 lives lost.¹

Improving the International Health Regulations is imperative for ensuring the timely exchange of public health data, including pathogen and epidemiological data, that will improve preparedness for health emergencies. The current framework could benefit from improvements to reinforce data sharing as well as processes for pandemic declaration. We remain committed to working with you to achieve quicker detection and more efficient, coordinated responses.

¹ Data from <https://worldhealthorg.shinyapps.io/covid/>. During January 2021, close to 100,000 deaths were reported per week.