

WHO puts back decision on smallpox virus samples

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After two days of dispute over the future of smallpox virus samples, member states of the World Health Organization decided Tuesday to postpone their negotiations on the issue for three years.

In a draft resolution put forward Monday to the 193 WHO member states, Russia and the US sought to conserve the samples, and wanted to begin discussing a possible date for their destruction only in five years.

Many countries want them destroyed as soon as possible however and, with no deal in sight after two days, the member states decided to look to the 67th World Health Assembly in three years' time, to reexamine the subject.

The question surrounding the destruction of the last official stocks of the [deadly virus](#) held by US and Russian laboratories has been recurring at the WHO since 1986.

Washington and Moscow want the viruses kept for scientific reasons, saying that it is necessary to continue research on their vaccines in order to prevent any resurgence of the transmissible disease which was officially eradicated in 1980.

They fear in particular that countries may have secretly kept the virus to be used as a biological weapon.

The European Union, Canada, Israel, Monaco, Colombia and China

were among countries that supports the US and Russia.

However, Iran speaking on behalf of 20 countries, as well as Thailand, Zimbabwe and Malaysia, were strongly against, saying that immediate destruction of the virus must be imposed.

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