

Public health officials warn of danger if genetic sequence data is included under the Nagoya Protocol

October 26 2018, by Bob Yirka



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A trio of public officials is issuing a warning in a Policy Forum piece in the journal *Science* regarding the call to include genetic sequence data under the Nagoya Protocol. In their essay, Carolina dos S. Ribeiro,

Marion P. Koopmans and George B. Haringhuizen with the Netherlands National Institute for Public Health and the Environment and Erasmus Medical Center, suggest that such a move could jeopardize international efforts to combat a future pandemic.

The Nagoya Protocol is a binding treaty adopted and signed by many nations of the world back in 2010. Its purpose was to protect the rights of entities involved in the creation of products through genetic research. The idea was to make sure that those groups who developed products owned the rights to benefit from them. The protocol extended to governmental rights, which led to sometimes complicated processes involved in obtaining permission to obtain and use samples. Recently, some in the field have suggested that genetic sequence data be added to the protocol. In their essay, the authors suggest such a move could be dangerous due to the complexity involved in allowing the sharing of genetic resources.

The authors suggest that inclusion of proprietary genetic sequence data in the protocol could result in preventing researchers around the world from acting swiftly to respond to outbreaks of deadly diseases, particularly those that could evolve into a pandemic. They note that sharing of genetic sequence data between researchers working to stop such an epidemic would be critical to the success of such an endeavor. They also note that the process of obtaining permission to receive such information from others under the protocol has become complex and difficult in many cases. They outline four scenarios, which they describe as models, to demonstrate the many hoops that researchers must jump through in order to obtain samples currently covered under the protocol—and how that requirement in a crisis would work against fighting off a rapidly expanding pandemic.

The authors conclude by suggesting that [public officials](#) work to reduce barriers to access during times of crisis in the interests of public health.

They offer examples of material transfer agreements that could be created and used during such times to prevent bottlenecks when speed is of the essence.

More information: "Threats to timely sharing of pathogen sequence data," *Science* 26 Oct 2018:Vol. 362, Issue 6413, pp. 404-406. [DOI: 10.1126/science.aau5229](https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aau5229)

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