

WHO launches global network to detect infectious disease threat

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The World Health Organization on Saturday launched a global network to help swiftly detect the threat from infectious diseases, like COVID-19, and share the information to prevent their spread.

The International Pathogen Surveillance Network (IPSN) will provide a platform for connecting countries and regions, improving systems for collecting and analyzing samples, the agency said.

The network aims to help ensure infectious disease threats are swiftly identified and tracked and the information shared and acted on to prevent catastrophes like the COVID [pandemic](#).

The network will rely on pathogen genomics to analyze the genetic code of viruses, bacteria and other disease-causing organisms to understand how infectious and deadly they are and how they spread.

The data gathered will feed into a broader disease surveillance system used to identify and track diseases, in a bid to contain outbreaks and to develop treatments and vaccines.

'Ambitious' goals

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus hailed the "ambitious" goals of the new network, saying it could "play a vital role in health security".

"As was so clearly demonstrated to us during the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is stronger when it stands together to fight shared health threats," he said.

The IPSN, announced a day before the [annual meeting](#) of WHO member states begins in Geneva, will have a secretariat within the WHO's Hub for Pandemic and Epidemic Intelligence.

It is the latest of several initiatives launched since COVID that aim to bolster the world's ability to prevent and more effectively respond to pandemic threats.

The network will bring together experts on genomics and [data analytics](#), drawn from governments, academia, the private sector and elsewhere.

"All share a [common goal](#): to detect and respond to disease threats before they become epidemics and pandemics, and to optimize routine disease surveillance," the agency said.

COVID highlighted the critical role pathogen genomics plays when responding to pandemic threats, with the WHO noting that without the rapid sequencing of the SARS CoV-2 virus, vaccines would not have been as effective and would not have become available as quickly.

New and more transmissible variants of the virus would also not have been identified as quickly.

"Genomics lies at the heart of effective epidemic and pandemic preparedness and response," the agency said, adding that it was also vital for surveillance of a range of diseases, from influenza to HIV.

While the pandemic spurred countries to scale up their genomics capacity, the agency warned that many still lack effective systems for collecting and analyzing samples.

The IPSN would help address such challenges, Tedros said, since it could "give every country access to pathogen genomic sequencing and analytics as part of its public health system".

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