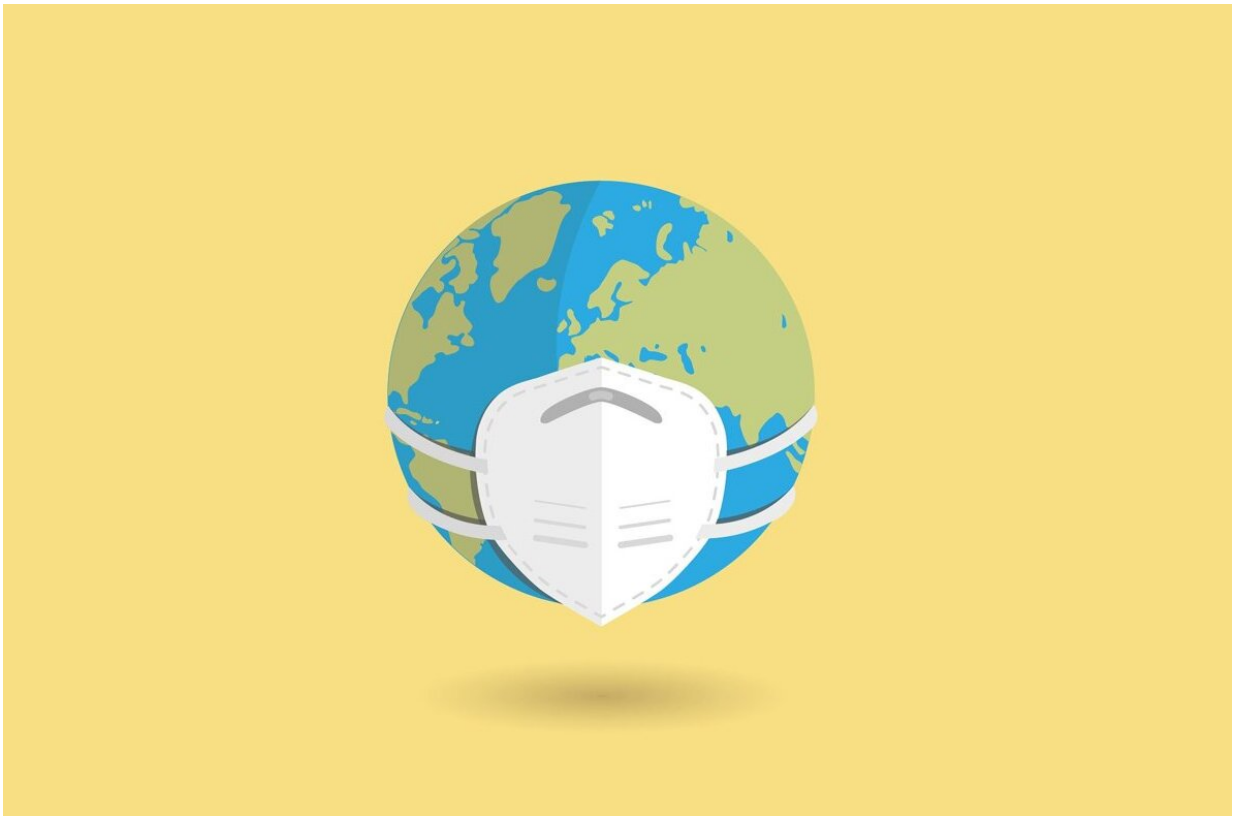


WHO urges pandemic accord in 2024 after years of COVID pain

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The head of the WHO said Tuesday the world needs to properly prepare for future pandemics after finally ending three years of COVID "crisis, pain and loss,"

In his end-of-year message, World Health Organization director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said 2023 had marked a turning point in fighting major health challenges but had also brought "immense and avoidable suffering."

Tedros called for ramped-up [relief efforts](#) for the Gaza Strip and urged nations to seal a "monumental" [pandemic](#) accord to plug preparedness gaps that were exposed during the pandemic.

Tedros declared an end to COVID-19 as an international public health emergency in May.

"This marked a turning point for the world following three years of crisis, pain and loss for people everywhere," he recalled in a video message. "I'm glad to see that life has returned to normal."

After 10 months, the WHO also lifted a similar emergency on mpox in May 2023, while the UN health agency approved new vaccines for malaria, dengue and meningitis, Tedros said.

Meanwhile Azerbaijan, Belize and Tajikistan were declared malaria-free.

Tedros also noted that the health impacts of climate change featured prominently at COP28, the latest annual UN climate conference held a few weeks ago.

However, "2023 has also been a year of immense and avoidable suffering and threats to health," he added.

Tedros spoke of the "barbaric" Hamas attacks on Israel, "followed by the unleashing of a devastating attack on Gaza."

The bloodiest ever Gaza war erupted when Hamas attacked southern Israel on October 7 and killed about 1,140 people, mostly civilians, according to an AFP tally based on Israeli figures.

They took 250 hostages of whom 129 remain inside Gaza.

Israel launched an extensive aerial bombardment and ground invasion. The campaign has killed 20,915 people, mostly women and children, according to Hamas-run Gaza's [health](#) ministry.

"Relief efforts are not coming close to meeting the needs of people in Gaza," Tedros said, underscoring the WHO's call for an immediate ceasefire.

A resurgence of cholera, with a record number of 40-plus outbreaks around the world, is also "especially concerning," he added.

As he closed out the WHO's 75th year, Tedros said that in terms of emergency preparedness and response, gaps remain in the world's readiness to prevent the next pandemic.

"But 2024 offers a unique opportunity to address these gaps," he said, with countries negotiating the first-ever global agreement on pandemic threats.

"The pandemic accord is being designed to bridge the gaps in global collaboration, cooperation and equity," said Tedros.

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