



# Frequently Asked Questions – Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005)

22 December 2023

Frequently Asked Questions on global health reforms, including changes to the International Health Regulations (2005).

## What are the International Health Regulations?

The *International Health Regulations (2005)* (IHR) provides the overarching legal framework that defines countries' rights and obligations in handling public health events and emergencies that have the potential to cross borders. The IHR are an instrument of international law that is legally-binding on 196 countries, including the 194 World Health Organization (WHO) Member States. Australia has complied with the IHR since their development in 2005.

Further information about the International Health Regulations can be found here: [International health regulations \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/international-health-regulations) and [International biosecurity obligations](https://www.who.int/biosafety/biosecurity).

## What recent changes have been made to the International Health Regulations?

At the 75th World Health Assembly held in Geneva in May 2022, two decisions on the IHR were taken:

1. The establishment of a Working Group to consider targeted amendments to the *International Health Regulations (2005)*
2. A change to Article 59, which will reduce the timeframe for future changes to the IHR to take effect from 24 to 12 months, and to reduce the timeframe for rejection of, or reservation to, future changes to the IHR from 18 to 10 months. This change was referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT) for consideration. JSCOT assessed the changes were expected to have negligible legal, financial, or practical impact on Australia and concluded that binding treaty action may be taken. These changes will come into force in May 2024.

## **Will changes to the International Health Regulations change Australia’s domestic law and health policies?**

Any changes to the IHR must be in line with the instrument’s core obligations to control the international spread of disease and strengthen countries abilities to coordinate and cooperate in response to a health emergency.

At this stage, none of the proposed changes are agreed. Changes to the IHR may create new international legal obligations for Australia. However, this doesn’t automatically change Australian law – only Parliament can do this. Any proposed changes to Australian law to implement amendments to the International Health Regulations would have to be considered and passed by Australia’s Parliament in order to become legally binding in Australia.

## **Proposed changes to the IHR were circulated by the WHO. Were these changes adopted?**

No.

Over 300 changes have been proposed to the International Health Regulations by Member States. Australia did not submit amendment proposals. These proposed changes are available on the WHO website: <https://apps.who.int/gb/wgihhr/>.

Proposed changes were initially considered by the IHR Review Committee. Throughout 2023-24, these changes will be negotiated at the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations (WGIHR). They have not yet been agreed or adopted. All WHO Member States are able to participate in the negotiations, including Australia.

## **What is the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations?**

The WGIHR is a WHO-established working group of Member States, and invited non-state actors, to negotiate targeted changes to the IHR. Australia is actively involved in the WGIHR.

## **Where can I find further information on the process to change the International Health Regulations?**

Further information on the process to change the International Health Regulations is available on the WHO website: [Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations \(2005\) \(who.int\)](https://www.who.int/news-room/working-group-on-amendments-to-the-international-health-regulations-2005).