



Frequently Asked Questions – Amendments to the International Health Regulations (2005)

5 July 2024

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/international-health-regulations/biosecurity).

What recent changes to the International Health Regulations have been agreed?

At the 77th World Health Assembly held in Geneva, 27 May – 1 June 2024, Member States, including Australia agreed to a package of targeted changes to the International Health Regulations (2005).

Key changes include:

- A new definition of a pandemic emergency to trigger more effective international collaboration in response to events that are at risk of becoming, or have become, a pandemic.
- Strengthened access to health products needed to respond to public health emergencies and financing for capacity building to prepare and respond to public health emergencies.
- A new Committee to promote and support cooperation among States Parties for the effective implementation of the IHR; and
- Creation of National IHR Authorities to improve coordination of implementation of the IHR within and among countries.

The enhanced IHR will help to:

- Build country capacities to prepare for, and respond to health emergencies;
- Strengthen public health response measures, including equitable access to health products needed to respond to public health emergencies;
- Strengthen information sharing and early responses to disease outbreaks; and
- Strengthen countries' implementation of the IHR.

The IHR amendments will be subject to Australian Parliament scrutiny including by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT). For more information, see [impacts on domestic Australian law](#).

A separate set of changes were also made to the IHR at the 75th World Health Assembly in Geneva in May 2022.

This included 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 came into force in May 2024.

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

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. The IHR amendments will be subject to appropriate parliamentary processes before Australia can take binding action. This includes consideration by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties (JSCOT).

Following consideration by JSCOT, any proposed changes to Australian law to implement the agreed changes to the IHR would have to be considered and passed by Australia's Parliament in order to become legally binding in Australia.

The changes to the IHR will not affect Australia's sovereignty to determine domestic health policies, in the best interests of Australians.

Further information on JSCOT and Australia's treaty making process is available on:

[JSCOT Committee Statement on WHO Related Treaty Actions – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](#)

[Australia's treaty-making process | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade \(dfat.gov.au\)](#)

What was the Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations?

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

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

The agreed changes to the International Health Regulations are available on the WHO website:

[Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations \(2005\) \(who.int\)](#)

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[Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations \(2005\) \(who.int\)](#)

[Q&A: International Health Regulations: amendments \(who.int\)](#)