WHO’s Ready for the Next Flu Pandemic?
Global Governance of Influenza Pandemic Preparedness

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Abstract
- In an increasingly interconnected world, viruses can spread faster and farther than ever before. Sometimes the spread of disease reaches pandemic levels, as has occurred with influenza.
- Pandemic preparedness is the means through which nations prepare for the population-level threat of infectious disease.
- National preparedness is not enough to counter a rapidly evolving virus like influenza; global coordination is needed.
- The World Health Organization’s (WHO) role has been to lead this coordinated effort.

How has the WHO used governance to address global influenza pandemic preparedness?
- This paper first explores the regulations and recommendations the WHO has developed for global influenza pandemic preparedness, the International Health Regulations (IHR) and Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Framework.
- Next, the 2009 H1N1 pandemic is used as a case study. Occurring chronologically in between the adoption of the IHR and PIP Framework, H1N1 revealed the shortcomings of the former and need for the latter.
- The governance challenges of influenza pandemic preparedness were discussed, including the limitations of the WHO’s approach.
- It was found that the pre-H1N1 approach was not well-suited for low-income countries, where health systems could not easily meet the IHR obligations established by the WHO.
- The more recent PIP Framework is non-binding, which risks stakeholders not following through with commitments should another influenza pandemic occur.
- Recommendations were made to improve the strategy of the WHO, including changes to governance, scope, funding, and enforcement.
- Pandemic influenza is an ongoing challenge for global health governance and the WHO has made progress in addressing this threat.

Key Concepts
- **Pandemic Preparedness**
  - State of being prepared for widespread disease, including surveillance and response capacities
  - Influenza (or Flu)
  - Group of rapidly mutating viruses that present an ongoing pandemic threat
- **World Health Organization (WHO)**
  - Intergovernmental organization concerned with the health of populations at the global level
- **Global Health Governance**
  - Means of promoting collective action towards the common goals of global health promotion and protection

WHO’s Governance Approach
- **Catalyst for action:** The Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), pandemic, caused by a coronavirus, revealed a lack of coordinated response to pandemic viruses.
- **Less than half of all countries have a national influenza plan.**

**International Health Regulations (IHR)**
- Minimum capacities required for disease surveillance, detection, reporting, and response
- Permits WHO to declare an international health emergency

**Pandemic Influenza Preparedness (PIP) Framework**
- Multi-sectoral (includes states, civil society, industry)
- Encourages information and materials sharing, funding partnerships, capacity-building

Method
- Introduction ➔ Pandemic preparedness and its importance for influenza pandemics
- Grey Literature Search ➔ The WHO’s governance approach for influenza pandemic preparedness
- Literature Search ➔ H1N1 as a case study to explore the effects of IHR and impact on the PIP Framework
- Interpret Findings ➔ Challenges and limitations of the WHO’s approach, recommendations for improved governance
- Conclusion ➔ Implications of the WHO’s governance actions on future influenza pandemics

Discussion
- **Governance Challenges**
  - Criticisms of the IHR
    - Minimum preparedness capacities not met
    - Declarations of international health emergencies have been inconsistent and subject to politics, focused on the priorities of wealthier countries
  - Limitations of the PIP Framework
    - No guarantee that stakeholders will follow through
    - Unfair burden for low-income countries
    - Non-compliance has been linked to a lack of technical assistance and financial resources
    - Local disease threats more pressing than influenza

**Case Study: 2009 H1N1 Pandemic**
- IHR improved the response to H1N1
  - Mandated reporting led to the timely declaration of an international health emergency and rapid response recommendations by the WHO
  - H1N1 revealed a lack of surveillance and response capacities in many countries
  - Low-income countries were unable to meet the minimum obligations and there was no system in place to assist them.
  - The PIP Framework was influenced by H1N1
  - Supports capacity-building through partnership contributions in low-income countries.
  - Increases the amount of information available to researchers and vaccine manufacturers.

**Timeline of Key Pandemics and Governance Actions**

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<th>SARS Pandemic</th>
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<th>H1N1 Pandemic</th>
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Recommendations
- Expand the scope of IHR and PIP Framework
- Make IHR emergency declarations more flexible to include intermediate-level threats
- Mandate PIP information sharing for seasonal influenza and non-influenza pathogens
- Encourages partnerships and capacity-building in regions where influenza is not the highest priority
- Improve funding and accountability
  - Increased and sustained funding for IHR capacity-building
  - Make essential PIP funding legally binding, as it is for the IHR, to ensure compliance
  - Increase accountability for PIP industry partners

**Implications**
- Flu pandemics are an ongoing challenge for global health governance; the WHO has made some progress in this domain
- Revised IHR mandated information sharing can increase pandemic preparedness
  - Highlighted room for improvement in the preparedness of resource-limited states, who will likely be impacted most by the next pandemic
- PIP Framework: multi-sectoral collaboration can be used to strengthen existing systems and build capacity
- Notably, the PIP Framework remains untested by a pandemic, though the WHO warns that the next influenza pandemic is not a matter of if, but when

**Timeline Image:** Image: Vector: OpenIcons

**Image:** Image: Free Icons from Pixabay