

Why has the guidance been revised?

All WHO programmes and departments continually review and revisit recommendations and policy guidance to reflect changing and better knowledge in science and other public health disciplines. The first pandemic preparedness guidance was issued by WHO in 1999 and two revisions have been made since then (in 2005 and 2009) based on lessons learned and new evidence-based research. The new guidance incorporates both lessons learned from experiences during the A(H1N1) 2009 pandemic, and suggestions from the International Health Regulations (2005) Review Committee, which gave an independent assessment of the performance of the IHR during the H1N1 pandemic.

How was the revision process organized?

Following a global information-gathering exercise, the WHO Secretariat formed an internal steering committee that guided the revision process and provided updates to sections of the document according to their expertise. In April 2013, an independent external peer review group reviewed and provided further input into the guidance.

What is the main focus in the new guidance?

The guidance encourages Member States to develop flexible pandemic risk management plans, which take into account the situation at national/local level. By doing so, national governments should be able to develop and implement timely actions that are well targeted to their local situations and based on the risk in their countries. The nature and scale of national actions at any point in time will be in line with the national risk assessments, taking into consideration the global risk assessment. Therefore, there is more flexibility for national governments in this new approach.

What are the differences in this guidance from previous editions of the guidance?

The new guidance stresses the importance of repeated risk assessment at all levels—globally, by WHO and communicated through the revised phases system—as well as at national and local levels, by local officials, in order to plan and respond effectively and independently. It also provides more information on the whole of government and whole of society approach to managing pandemic influenza. Another change is the inclusion of the principles of emergency risk management for health, recognising that these principles apply to all hazards, including pandemic influenza, and can be used for the management of any health emergency, making the most cost-effective use of resources.

Why was the approach to global pandemic phases revised?

The revised approach to phases reflects the lessons learned from the A(H1N1) 2009 pandemic. The new global phases, which reflect the global risk assessment, are to be used for describing the spread of a new influenza subtype, taking account of the disease it causes, around the world. The revised global phases are also to be used for communicating the global situation but, as they are an 'average' of the situation in all countries, do not reflect what is happening in each individual country. Management decisions and actions at the country level should be based on the country's specific situation and needs. For instance, in the Alert phase, one country might be fully responding to an influenza outbreak, while another country might still be involved in preparedness activities.

Does the new approach to global phases take into account severity?

Yes. Severity assessment is critical to the risk assessment for pandemic influenza. The phases reflect the global risk assessment. The new guidance includes information on ways to measure severity.

So how will declaring a pandemic work in practice if it is recognised now that the situation can vary substantially from country to country?

In line with the main focus of the guidance, where risk management actions are based on risk assessment, the *declaration* of a pandemic will also be based on risk assessment. The Emergency Committee, which will be formed to advise the Director General of WHO, will consider all available information, including country information, assess the risk and provide the necessary advice.

What will specifically happen when WHO declares a pandemic?

The declaration of a pandemic may be used to communicate the need for collective global action to manage the risks of a pandemic. It may also be the trigger for certain regulatory actions, or for legal or contractual agreements to come into effect.

Why are you releasing interim guidance now?

The Interim Pandemic Influenza Risk Management Guidance has been peer-reviewed through a process that included reviewers from around the world. The recent occurrence of human infections from avian influenza A(H7N9) and other respiratory diseases highlights how this new guidance could be useful to countries and international partners in managing the risks from the current situation. There will be an opportunity for Member States to comment on the interim guidance.