**Letter to the editor**

*News media play an important role in setting the agenda for public debate. News coverage can help to focus attention on an issue like epidemic preparedness, elevate its importance in the eyes of government officials, and catalyze policy changes that keep our community safe from disease outbreaks and other health threats. That is why it is so important to encourage journalists to ask questions, highlight the importance of epidemic preparedness, and even editorialize on the subject. One way to do so is to write a letter to the editor.* [*Click here*](http://www.allyoucanread.com) *to find contact details for news media in your country. Below is a template letter for you to adapt and email or mail to a newspaper, magazine, radio or television station serving your community:*

We’ve all seen the headlines in recent years about Ebola, bird flu and other epidemic diseases. It’s not a question of “if” but “when” we will face the next, potentially devastating, outbreak – and it could happen right here at home.

Fortunately, global health experts have developed a framework to prevent this from happening, and [add the name of your country here] is one of 194 countries bound by this framework, called the International Health Regulations (IHR). However, we have to make sure that it is fully implemented.

Through the IHRs, which were updated in 2005, countries have agreed to build their capacities to detect, assess and report public health events. [Country] has taken an important first step by committing to a voluntary Joint External Evaluation (JEE) of its epidemic preparedness with the World Health Organization. It should conduct the JEE, and develop a national plan to fill identified preparedness gaps, as soon as possible.

A robust, fully funded and implemented plan is essential to find, stop and prevent health threats and minimize the impact of disease outbreaks on our community and loved ones. Not only will these investments in health security save precious lives, but they will also save money – as it is cheaper for us to stay healthy than to get treated for disease.

News media play an important role in setting the agenda for public discourse. In addition to publishing this letter, I urge you and your team to report on the many facets of epidemic preparedness and engage government leaders on the need to conduct a JEE and swiftly develop a plan to close epidemic preparedness gaps.