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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Address the complete lifecycle of emergencies 2 Define the triggering events 3 Balance strong and agile decision-making with meaningful oversight 4 Fund adequately 5 Equip authorities with all relevant public health tools 6 Fulfill IHR obligations | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7 Protect human rights 8 Integrate functioning health strategies 9 Ensure flow of health data across all levels of governance 10 Safeguard health care workers 11 Enforce the rules without imposing unjust penalties 12 Promote transparency |
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1 Address the complete lifecycle of emergencies

A public health emergency is an occurrence or imminent threat of an illness or health condition that poses a substantial risk of a significant number of human fatalities or of permanent or long-term disabilities. As any health crisis evolves from sporadic incidents to clusters to wide-spread prevalence and back down, the strategies shift through phases of preparedness, containment, mitigation, suppression and recovery.

KEY ELEMENTS

Allows flexibility in emergency response: The legal framework must empower officials to seamlessly and appropriately contain, mitigate and suppress the emergency—each of which requires different techniques and intensity of action. Overly rigid requirements—for example, mandating the same response no matter the situation or severity—will hinder the response and waste precious resources.

Prepares for emergencies in advance: A legal framework that only addresses how to handle an emergency once it has occurred misses the opportunity to prevent, delay or abate the crisis as well as to learn lessons that may stop the next one. The law should create permanent institutions and procedures that are dedicated to preparing and preventing public health emergencies.

Incorporates alert levels: Risk alert-level systems communicate the level of health risk and indicate what measures should be taken at each level to maximize safety. Alert-level systems provide a framework to support clear decision-making, improve accountability and communicate with the public. In the highest alert stage, there may be strict measures, like stay-at-home requirements. As the level of alert is reduced, a stepwise lessening of these restrictions is possible.

Mandates evaluation of past response efforts: The law should mandate officials to conduct a full evaluation of the response once the immediate crisis has passed, often known as an After-Action Review (AAR) or Inter-Action Review (IAR). The comprehensive evaluation should make recommendations on how policymakers can improve the legal framework before the next emergency.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Does your legal framework:

- Cover all phases of emergency?
- Provide authorities with flexibility to adjust activities to different phases?
- Empower permanent government bodies to focus on emergency readiness?
- Delineate the phases of emergency based on set metrics or alert levels?
- Require a formal evaluation of the response following a public health emergency?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- World Health Organization (WHO), Critical Preparedness, Readiness and Response Actions for COVID-19, Interim Guidance, June 2020.
- Resolve to Save Lives, Staying Alert: Navigating COVID-19 Risk Toward a New Normal, May 2020.
- World Health Organization, Guidance for Conducting a Country COVID-19 Intra-Action Review (IAR), July 2020.