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WHO establishes global network to detect and prevent infectious disease threats

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COVID-19 highlighted the critical role pathogen genomics plays in responding to pandemic threats



The World Health Organisation (WHO) and partners are launching a global network to help protect people from infectious disease threats through the power of pathogen genomics.

The International Pathogen Surveillance Network (IPSN) will provide a platform to connect countries and regions, improving systems for collecting and analyzing samples, using these data to drive public health decision-making, and sharing that information more broadly.

Pathogen genomics analyses the genetic code of viruses, bacteria and other disease-causing organisms to understand how infectious they are, how deadly they are, and how they spread. With this information, scientists and public health officials can identify and track diseases to prevent and respond to outbreaks as part of a broader disease surveillance system, and to develop treatments and vaccines.

Despite recent scale-up in genomics capacity in countries as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many still lack effective systems for collecting and analyzing samples or using those data to drive public health decision-making. There is not enough sharing of data, practices, and innovations to build a robust global health surveillance architecture. Budgets that soared during the pandemic, allowing a rapid build-up of capabilities, are now being slashed, even in the wealthiest countries.

The IPSN will tackle these challenges through a global network, connecting geographies and disease-specific networks, to build a collaborative system to better detect, prevent and respond to disease threats.