



.....1 February 2021 to 31 January 2022

COVID-19 STRATEGIC PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE PLAN



World Health
Organization



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WHO/WHE/2021.02

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..... FOREWORD FROM THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL



In a little over 12 months the pandemic has claimed more than 2 million lives and damaged the economic and social fabric of every society. Across the world the pandemic has thrown existing inequalities into stark relief. Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals has stalled, and in some cases may have reversed. Up to 100 million people have slipped into extreme poverty – the first rise in global poverty in more than two decades.

Ending the devastation wrought by COVID-19 requires coordinated global action. In 2020, WHO’s Strategic preparedness and response plan for COVID-19 set out the key actions at national, regional, and global levels needed to suppress transmission, protect the vulnerable, reduce mortality and morbidity, and accelerate the development of the tools the world needs to turn the tide against the disease. Over the past year WHO has been at the centre of an unprecedented global effort from partners, national authorities, communities and the private sector to put that plan into action.

Through 157 global, regional, and national offices, WHO has worked with a broad coalition of partners to generate evidence and leverage expertise to guide the response, coordinate direct operational and technical support to drive implementation at the national level, and put the mechanisms in place to learn and adapt to a dynamic and rapidly evolving situation. Crucially, the race to develop COVID-19 vaccines, diagnostics and therapies catalyzed by the *Global research roadmap* and the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator has delivered results with unprecedented speed.

The world now stands at a pivotal juncture: we need a new plan of action. The arrival of the first generation of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines was a moment of enormous hope, but its arrival has coincided with the emergence of new challenges, many of which threaten to exacerbate existing inequities. WHO’s *COVID-19 Strategic preparedness and response plan 2021*, and the accompanying *Operational planning guidelines*, set out the practical, coordinated action we must collectively take at the national, regional, and global level to overcome those challenges, address those inequities, and plot a course out of the pandemic.

The first *Strategic preparedness and response plan for COVID-19* united a global coalition of partners behind a common set of objectives. That solidarity and unity of purpose has given rise to incredible achievements over the past 12 months. Countries have been supported to transform national and subnational COVID-19 preparedness and response capacities. When these capacities have fallen short, WHO and partners have come together to deliver solutions. The work done to coordinate and accelerate the development of vaccines, therapeutics and diagnostics has paid off, but it is now vital that these tools are used strategically for the global good.

The COVID-19 pandemic is in many respects unprecedented, but in no respect was it unforeseen. As we focus on our immediate collective response, it is vital that we learn from the mistakes, missteps and missed opportunities of the past if we are to avoid repeating them. That means learning from the mistakes of the HIV pandemic, when it took four decades for the global poor to get access to the life-saving medicines that were available in high-income countries. It means learning from the H1N1 pandemic, when the poor gained access to life-saving vaccines only once the pandemic was over. And it means learning from the Ebola epidemic in West Africa, which demonstrated that many years of hard-won development gains can be undone by a large-scale epidemic when there is underinvestment in epidemic preparedness and readiness, and that epidemic control relies on effective community engagement and the trust communities have in the government and health services.



An uncoordinated, “me-first” approach to vaccination not only condemns the world’s poorest and most vulnerable to unnecessary risk, it is strategically and economically self-defeating. Short-termism, and the pursuit of narrow national self-interest could have disastrous consequences in the medium term. The continued spread of SARS-CoV-2 around the world hastens the day that new variants of the virus will emerge with the potential to undermine the effectiveness of vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics; the restrictions needed to contain SARS-CoV-2 around the world will be unnecessarily prolonged, leading to increased human and economic suffering in every country, but hitting the poorest and most vulnerable hardest.

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A recent study commissioned by the International Chamber of Commerce concluded that even with high vaccine coverage in high-income countries, restricted coverage elsewhere would cost high-income economies an additional US\$ 2.4 trillion in 2021 alone. Yet in the weeks since the first COVID-19 vaccines were approved, we have seen countries circumvent the ACT-Accelerator to make bilateral

deals with manufacturers at the expense of the most vulnerable around the world. Vaccine equity is not just a moral imperative, it is a strategic and economic imperative. We call on all countries and partners to give greater priority to supporting the ACT-Accelerator reach its target to distribute 2 billion vaccine doses by the end of 2021, through sharing doses, funding the COVAX mechanism, and by supporting WHO to ensure that every country has the technical and operational capacity to vaccinate its most vulnerable groups.

The evidence is clear: solidarity, equity, and global leadership are the only routes out of the pandemic. WHO’s contribution to the COVID-19 Strategic preparedness and response plan 2021, and the ACT-Accelerator within it, provides the foundation on which we can build an effective, equitable response together, and end the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus
WHO Director-General



.....ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT.....

WHO published the first [COVID-19 Strategic preparedness and response plan](#) (SPRP) on 4 February, 2020, four days after the Director-General [declared](#) the novel coronavirus outbreak a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC), WHO's highest level of alarm under international law. As the COVID-19 pandemic evolved, the SPRP was [updated](#) in April 2020 to underline the importance of critical aspects of the public health response, and support countries to safely and sustainably transition out of the severe movement restrictions that had been put in place in some countries.

As we enter 2021, it is again important that we take stock of the evolving epidemiological situation around the world, including the emergence of SARS-CoV-2 variants of concern, review the lessons learned about the virus and our response, identify the gaps in our knowledge while anticipating the potential challenges ahead, and ensure a gender-responsive and equitable response based on a respect for human rights. We must adapt our strategic approach to COVID-19 at national and global levels to plan and support the rapid and equitable deployment of new tools such as rapid diagnostics and vaccines.

COVID-19 will not be the last health threat or emergency – many countries have already been forced to manage concomitant crises. The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder that the costs of effective preparedness are dwarfed by the costs of a failure to prepare. The world now has an opportunity to build on progress made in 2020 and move towards a sustainable future of emergency preparedness and readiness built on a foundation of strong and resilient health systems.

This document, the **COVID-19 SPRP 2021** is intended to help guide the public health response to COVID-19 at national and subnational levels, and to update the global strategic priorities in support of this effort. This document was drafted based on the input of colleagues involved in the COVID-19 response across partners, response pillars, and at the national, regional, and global levels.

- **Part I** of this document gives a brief overview of the global epidemiological situation as we enter the first quarter of 2021, and summarizes the main challenges as we look forward.
- **Part II** sets out the strategic objectives for 2021, and describes the broad response strategy – from national level to global and regional coordination – through which we will achieve those objectives together: as individuals, families, communities, countries, regional and international organizations, and as partners, in solidarity.

In addition, this document is complemented by the **COVID-19 Operational plan**, which sets out:

- updated *Operational planning guidelines to support country preparedness and response*, which set out the key actions and measures to be taken at national and subnational level to ensure a comprehensive and effective response to COVID-19, including the implementation of new vaccines, therapeutics, and diagnostics in every country and context, including the most challenging and under-resourced contexts;
- strategic global and regional priorities to support national efforts, organized by response pillar;
- global and regional support to accelerate equitable access to new COVID-19 tools;
- research and innovation priorities under each response pillar;
- key performance indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

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