

Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)

June 24, 2020

What is PHEIC?

- Some serious public health events that endanger international public health may be determined under the Regulations to be public health emergencies of international concern (PHEIC).
- **The term PHEIC is defined in the International Health Regulation (2005) as “an extraordinary event which is determined, as provided in these Regulations:**
 - to constitute a public health risk to other States through the international spread of disease and
 - to potentially require a coordinated international response”. This definition implies a situation that: is serious, unusual or unexpected; carries implications for public health beyond the affected State’s national border; and may require immediate international action.

How many PHEIC have been announced in recent times?

Since 2009, there have been six PHEIC declarations:

1. The 2009 H1N1 (or swine flu) pandemic
2. The 2014 Polio declaration
3. The 2014 outbreak of Ebola in Western Africa
4. The 2015–16 Zika virus epidemic
5. The ongoing 2018–20 Kivu Ebola epidemic, and
6. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Which International Authority determines it?

- **The responsibility of determining whether an event is within this category lies with the WHO Director-General**

and requires the convening of a committee of experts – the IHR Emergency Committee.

- **This committee advises the Director-General on the recommended measures to be promulgated on an emergency basis, known as temporary recommendations.**
- Temporary recommendations include health measures to be implemented by the State Party experiencing the PHEIC, or by other States Parties, to prevent or reduce the international spread of disease and avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic.
- **The Emergency Committee also gives advice on the determination of the event as a PHEIC in circumstances where there is inconsistency in the assessment of the event** between the Director-General and the affected country/countries.
- The Emergency Committee continues to provide advice to the Director-General throughout the duration of the PHEIC, including any necessary changes to the recommended measures and **on the determination of PHEIC termination.**
- **WHO maintains an IHR roster of experts and the members of an IHR Emergency Committee** are selected from this roster and/or WHO expert
- Advisory panels and committees. At least one member of the Emergency Committee should be an expert nominated by a State Party within whose territory the event arises.