

Special Conference Covid-19

Evaluating the intergovernmental reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic and making recommendations for future preparedness and response to other pandemics



Research Report

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Forum: *Special Conference looking back at the Covid-19 Pandemic*

Issue: *Evaluating the intergovernmental reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic and making recommendations for future preparedness and response to other pandemics*

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Introduction

Covid 19, also known as the coronavirus disease, is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. It was first reported in Wuhan, China on the 31st of December 2019. It is considered the most crucial global health calamity of the past hundred years and sits as the most severe challenge the humankind faced of the century. Covid-19 is a novel severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus, and common symptoms are fever, cough, and loss of taste and smell. Over the past 2 years, it has rampaged through the world, leaving governments, communities and individuals reeling from the impact. Not only healthwise, but socially, economically, and politically. The Covid-19 outbreak has severely impacted the labor industry and the global economy. As more vaccines were tested, funded and approved, either privately or by the government, controversy has ensued and debate has been held over what the right thing to do was/is. Almost every state has had a different response to the pandemic, and it has drastically impacted their communities, workforce and all other parts of their countries. Ensuring that all member states can effectively protect their citizens and lay the groundwork for a more efficient, less costly and less damaging response is a priority. In order to learn from the world's mistakes and strengths during the pandemic, we must identify what was effective and how the world can be better prepared for any future pandemics.

Definition of Key Terms

Asymptomatic

Showing no symptoms [of Covid-19].

Lockdown

An official order to control the movement of people or vehicles because of a dangerous situation [transmission of the virus]

Infectious Disease

An infectious disease is a disease arising from the presence and activity of a microbial agent, such as bacteria, viruses, parasites, or fungi; it is transmissible by infection or contagion directly or through a vector. They can also arise from animals and are called zoonotic diseases.

Pandemic

A pandemic is a worldwide epidemic that crosses international borders and usually affects a large group of people.

Reproduction Rate

“The reproduction number (R) indicates how fast the coronavirus is spreading. R shows how many people on average are infected by someone who carries the virus. The number of transmissions is more or less constant when R is 1, drops when R is below 1 and increases when R is higher than 1.” (Rijks overheid)

SARS

An infectious disease with symptoms including fever and cough and in some cases progressing to pneumonia and respiratory failure. It is caused by a coronavirus.

Quarantine

A state, period, or place of isolation in which people or animals that have arrived from elsewhere or been exposed to infectious or contagious disease are placed.

General Overview

Covid 19's reproduction rate (R) has fluctuated between 0.48 and 2.81. Approximately, 6.5 million deaths have been recorded from the disease, and over 600 million cases, with the most deaths and cases being in the United States, following with India. However, due to the impossibility to test everyone, it is 100% sure that there have been more deaths and cases that are unrecorded. Especially at the start of pandemic, coronavirus was not taken seriously by governmental officials, who then perpetuated that mindset to their supporters. Furthermore, transmission increased primarily from the younger generation who are less vulnerable to this virus, are asymptomatic and therefore unaware they've been infected. It is believed that 40%-45% of infected people are asymptomatic.

Almost all countries have attempted to minimize the transmission of the disease through targeted testing & treating high risk patients, quarantining suspected active cases employing contact tracing, restricting the possibility for large gatherings, while maintaining some form of lockdown (complete or partial). At the start of the current pandemic the WHO stated governments shouldn't opt to restrict travel and movement altogether for long periods of time, saying it can interfere with aid and support. It is, however, a good measure at the beginning of an outbreak so that countries can gain time for risk assessment and come up with a plan. WHO's stance on lockdowns was "in certain circumstances, measures that restrict the movement of people may prove temporarily useful, such as in settings with few international connections and limited response capacities". The general recommendation was to closely monitor reports of influenza-like symptoms and pneumonia, keep the general public informed on the status of their country, follow the International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005), and urge member states not to interfere too much with international traffic. This recommendation was given towards the start of the pandemic, when there wasn't enough information known to give the advice that governments received later on.

As the biggest health threat the global community was faced with in this century, and the only international one to this scale, it could be said that there should have been a protocol in place for a pandemic like this one. What the world has learned is that we can not underestimate them. Based on the contagion rate and severity, protocols must be put in place in order to quickly combat the rapid spread of potential future infectious diseases.

World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization or the WHO is a globally active specialized international organization that deals with global public health, continuously in function with 194 Member States, across all six continents, as well as 150 field offices worldwide. It is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland. However, it has six semi-autonomous continental offices to improve its targeted response. Its member nations govern the organization, all decisions made by the organization revolve around the central goal of the WHO, which states "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health."

The WHO aims to build a better, healthier future for people all over the world; its primary goals are to reduce the spread of infectious diseases, strive to combat diseases from communicable diseases to non-communicable and hereditary diseases, as well as down to the most basic rights including ensuring the air they breathe is as safe as it can be, along with the food they may eat, the water from which they drink as well as their medical needs like medicines and vaccines. It is considered to be the number one source of information regarding the pandemic.

Major Parties Involved

People's Republic of China

The People's Republic of China was the first country affected by Covid-19, and held the world's interest as it battled to understand and contain the new pathogen. But China has reported only 0.05% of the total number of global cases despite making up 19% of the world's population. China brought the first outbreak of covid-19 under control in March 2020. The response to the virus then entered a new stage aiming at preventing importation and local resurgence of covid-19. Their response was quick and harsh, and effective. Methods used in China strictly were quarantining, social distancing, mass testing and contact tracing.

United States of America

The United States has the world's highest GDP, and is known as one of the most influential countries globally. It also has the highest amount of cases and deaths due to Covid 19. During the pandemic's crucial early days and weeks, then president Donald Trump and other authority figures actively minimized the virus's threat. The ripples of the lack of initial action to combat the epidemic can be felt throughout the country still.

"The CDC developed its own test for the virus rather than employing a German-developed one used by the World Health Organization." (Scientific American) By the time more accurate testing became available, community spread was already rampant in many places, making it difficult or impossible to do contact tracing and isolate people before they infected others. While in office, Trump also announced that he was cutting the United States funding to the WHO, who were accused of mishandling and not taking a harsher stance towards China and reporting their earliest cases. However, this was undone by President Joe Biden, who was elected in November 2020. Unlike his predecessor, President Biden has been set on enforcing precautionary measures including but not limited to: stimulus checks, a 100 day mask mandate, increasing testing facilities and vaccination programs.

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom was the one of first Western countries to start mass-vaccination programs, giving the Pfizer vaccine an emergency approval in December of 2020. London has been an epicenter of the virus, having gone in multiple lockdowns throughout the pandemic.

Center for Disease Control and Prevention

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (or CDC) is a national public health institute in the United States; it stands by the federal agency under the Department of Health and Human Services, headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia. Its focal goal prevails to be to protect the public

health and safety at a national as well as international level through the control and prevention of disease outbreaks. The CDC focuses on infectious viruses, foodborne pathogens, and bacterial diseases, looking to develop and apply disease control and prevention frameworks specifically designed and targeted.

Timeline of Events

July 1, 1946	Formation of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention
April 7, 1948	Formation of the World Health Organization
December 22, 1971	Formation of Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors without Borders)
May 24, 2011	PIP (Pandemic Influenza Preparedness) framework comes into effect to improve and strengthen the reaction to influenza viruses with human pandemic potential.
December 31, 2019	Wuhan Municipal Health Commission reports a cluster of pneumonia cases. These early pneumonia cases eventually were identified as a novel coronavirus. There were no casualties at this point.
January 5, 2020	WHO publishes a “first Disease Outbreak News” on the virus. This is the WHO’s flagship technical publication to the scientific and public health communities. These publications are also often a referral for global news outlets. China had told WHO the conditions of those infected.
January 10, 2020	WHO issued a comprehensive package of technical guidance to help detect, test, and manage cases. The help was based on SARS and MERS and known modes of transmission of respiratory viruses.
February 11, 2020	Outbreak is recognized as Covid-19
March 7, 2020	100,000 cases detected around the world. This is usually the mark at which the WHO realizes the extreme severity of the virus. The WHO urged all countries to stop COVID-19 any cost necessary.
December 2, 2020	The United Kingdom Approves Pfizer Vaccine. In a state of emergency, the Pfizer vaccine gets approved. After approval, the UK’s vaccination program is implemented shortly after this- being the first Western country to do so.
December 18, 2020	The USA approves the Moderna vaccine. Through this approval, millions more are given the accessibility to the vaccine.
April 2, 2021	CDC recommends that people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19 can safely travel at lower-risk to themselves.

January 31, 2022

FDA fully approves the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine for all people ages 18 years and older.

UN Involvement, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties and Events

- Conference on the International Health Regulation, General Assembly
- Global health and foreign policy: World Health Organization, General Assembly, Resolution A/RES/72/13
- Resolution A/RES/73/131, Scope, modalities, format, and organization of the High-Level Meeting on Universal Health Coverage
- World Health Summit, October 2019

Past Attempts to Solve this Issue

As shown partially in the timeline, there have been various attempts to create organizations and solutions to form effective responses to the various infectious disease outbreaks across the world over the last twenty years. However, despite the success of several ones, more intervention is imperative to mitigate the spread and impact of infectious disease outbreaks. The World Health Organization alone has had several attempts at, but its primary focus has always been to solve the problem slowly, looking to attend to the disease outbreak at hand. Over the past few decades, the WHO and other multilateral government organizations, such as but not limited to the United Nations, are also equally involved in the discussion, have been able to increase access to healthcare while simultaneously decreasing mortality rates. The WHO goes through a rigorous process of and discussion before deciding on the outcomes and solutions for disease outbreaks. These solutions are often based on the broad principles held by the WHO and signed off on by its member nations.

Possible Solutions

The first method requires all the member states of the WHO or another group of multilateral health organizations, which could include the CDC and ECDC, convene and set up new organizations to or create a set of rules and regulations around the procedures to follow when a threat or pandemic appears. It is also essential to help developing countries grow financially in a stable manner, allowing them to improve national health care as there is a direct correlation between GDP and aggregate health expenditure. Disease outbreaks of pandemic potential vary widely in the resources, capacities, and strategies required for their mitigation; however, standard shared requirements for effective preparedness and response exist.

Medicine availability in low-income countries persists in standing as a barrier to affordable medical care access; there exist multiple factors required in ensuring everyone has access to essential medicines; firstly, they must be available, and Secondly, they must be affordable. Increasing the resources of active organizations, such as the Médecins sans Frontiers, would help provide the linkage between the patients and the production if needed funds may be taken from a financial institution such as the World Bank in the form of a grant or interest-free loan.

Another partial solution could be to increase public confidence in the health care systems. When it comes to giving people the vaccines they need to stay healthy and thrive, trust is crucial. Building confidence in healthcare workers, health institutions and national health agencies is therefore key, as that's where the critical information comes from. By building trust and making sure the guidance from these sources is evidence-based and respected, we can help prevent future pandemics. On top of trust, it's important to communicate effectively with the public about the healthcare services that are available to them. People need to know that vaccines are available, as well as information like where to go to get the doses and when vaccination workers will be administering them. That's particularly crucial in rural communities where temporary clinics often provide these services.

Additionally, establishing effective surveillance and response systems would be very effective. During the COVID-19 pandemic, clusters of cases have emerged in different parts of the world at different times. New and sometimes more transmissible variants have regularly circulated, and they've often spread quickly. With any virus that's constantly moving and changing, it's important to have effective testing and reporting mechanisms in place to monitor them. That means that if an outbreak occurs or a new variant emerges, it can be flagged quickly to a central health authority. By raising the alarm quickly, effective measures can be quickly put in place to help limit virus transmission. This kind of surveillance is best when it's done at a community level.

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