



Will Ebola change the game? Ten essential reforms before the next pandemic. The report of the Harvard-LSHTM Independent Panel on the Global Response to Ebola

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Executive summary

The west African Ebola epidemic that began in 2013 exposed deep inadequacies in the national and international institutions responsible for protecting the public from the far-reaching human, social, economic, and political consequences of infectious disease outbreaks. The Ebola epidemic raised a crucial question: what reforms are needed to mend the fragile global system for outbreak prevention and response, rebuild confidence, and prevent future disasters? To address this question, the Harvard Global Health Institute and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine jointly launched the Independent Panel on the Global Response to Ebola. Panel members from academia, think tanks, and civil society have collectively reviewed the worldwide response to the Ebola outbreak. After difficult and lengthy deliberation, we concluded that major reforms are both warranted and feasible. The Panel's conclusions offer a roadmap of ten interrelated recommendations across four thematic areas:

1 Preventing major disease outbreaks

All countries need a minimum level of core capacity to detect, report, and respond rapidly to outbreaks. The shortage of such capacities in Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone enabled Ebola to develop into a national, and worldwide, crisis.

- Recommendation 1: The global community must agree on a clear strategy to ensure that governments invest domestically in building such capacities and mobilise adequate external support to supplement efforts in poorer countries. This plan must be supported by a transparent central system for tracking and monitoring the results of these resource flows. Additionally, all governments must agree to regular, independent, external assessment of their core capacities.
- Recommendation 2: WHO should promote early reporting of outbreaks by commending countries that rapidly and publicly share information, while publishing lists of countries that delay reporting. Funders should create economic incentives for early reporting by committing to disburse emergency funds rapidly to assist countries when outbreaks strike and compensating for economic losses that might result. Additionally, WHO must confront

governments that implement trade and travel restrictions without scientific justification, while developing industry-wide cooperation frameworks to ensure private firms such as airlines and shipping companies continue to provide crucial services during emergencies.

2 Responding to major disease outbreaks

When preventive measures do not succeed, outbreaks can cross borders and surpass national capacities. Ebola exposed WHO as unable to meet its responsibility for responding to such situations and alerting the global community.

- Recommendation 3: A dedicated centre for outbreak response with strong technical capacity, a protected budget, and clear lines of accountability should be created at WHO, governed by a separate Board.
- Recommendation 4: A transparent and politically protected WHO Standing Emergency Committee should be delegated with the responsibility for declaring public health emergencies.
- Recommendation 5: An independent UN Accountability Commission should be created to do system-wide assessments of worldwide responses to major disease outbreaks.

3 Research: production and sharing of data, knowledge, and technology

Rapid knowledge production and dissemination are essential for outbreak prevention and response, but reliable systems for sharing epidemiological, genomic, and clinical data were not established during the Ebola outbreak.

- Recommendation 6: Governments, the scientific research community, industry, and non-governmental organisations must begin to develop a framework of norms and rules operating both during and between outbreaks to enable and accelerate research, govern the conduct of research, and ensure access to the benefits of research.
- Recommendation 7: Additionally, research funders should establish a worldwide research and development financing facility for outbreak-relevant drugs, vaccines, diagnostics, and non-pharmaceutical supplies (such as personal protective equipment) when commercial incentives are not appropriate.

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