

National IHR Focal Points: Overview of IHR NFP Functions and Operational Framework



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Outline

- Background and overview
- IHR NFP operational framework
- Mandatory functions
- Event notification and information dissemination
- Challenges / questions
- Summary



Background

A highly mobile, interdependent and interconnected world provides opportunities for both the rapid spread of risk and the improvement of global preparedness and response to potential public health emergencies that may have an international impact.



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International Health Regulations (IHR)

Global health security legal instrument to:

- Prevent
- Protect against
- Provide a public health response

...for ALL public health threats

INTERNATIONAL HEALTH REGULATIONS (IHR)
– from policy to people's health security

What are the IHR?
The IHR are legally binding and help countries work together to protect lives threatened by the spread of diseases and other health risks, including radiation and chemical hazards

5 reasons why the IHR matter

 HEALTH THREATS HAVE NO BORDERS The IHR strengthen countries' abilities to control diseases that cross borders at ports, airports and ground crossings	 TRAVEL AND TRADE ARE MADE SAFER The IHR promote trade and tourism in countries and prevent economic damage	 GLOBAL HEALTH SECURITY IS ENHANCED The IHR establish an early warning system not only for diseases but for anything that threatens human health and livelihoods	 DAILY THREATS ARE KEPT UNDER CONTROL The IHR guide countries to detect, assess and respond to threats and inform other countries quickly	 ALL SECTORS BENEFIT The IHR prepare all sectors for potential emergencies through coordination and information sharing
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Until all sectors are on board with the IHR, no country is ready

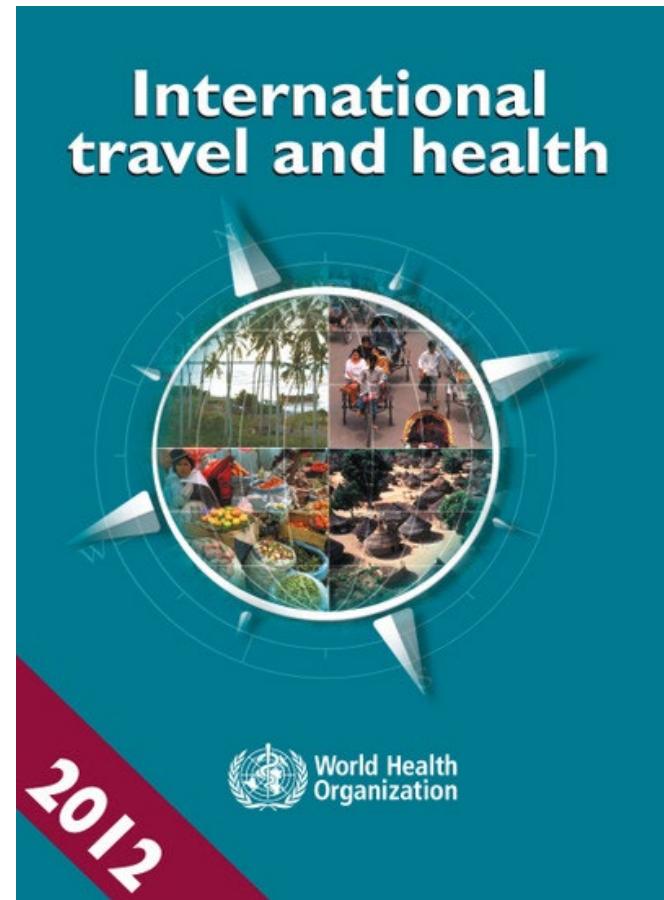
www.euro.who.int/ehr

World Health Organization
REGIONAL OFFICE FOR Europe

A legally-binding global health security framework agreed to by 196 States Parties, including all World Health Organization (WHO) Member States.

Principle of “non-interference”

- Aiming to limit international spread of disease and other hazards
- While avoiding unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade through:
 - Early, rapid, and coordinated interventions
 - Consistent with the level of risk
 - Evidence-based approach where possible
 - Closely timed across regions and continents



Core public health capacities

- Eight essential elements of a public health system
- Intersectoral and multidisciplinary
- Foundational for cross-cutting challenges
 - Zoonotic diseases
 - Chemical events
 - Radiological events
 - Food safety
 - International (designated) points of entry into the country

Legislation and policy

Coordination / communication*

Surveillance

Response

Preparedness

Risk communications

Human Resources

Laboratory

*IHR (2005) created a new function –
the National IHR Focal Point (NFP)



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IHR: a global legal instrument

What are the International Health Regulations?

- A global legal instrument, legally binding States Parties, aimed to help the international community prevent, protect, control and respond to diseases – independent of their origin – that have the potential to cross borders and threaten people worldwide
- A collection of domestic and international best practices for public health preparedness and response
- An opportunity to strengthen relations among sectors and improve day-to-day public health capacities

What are they not?

- New vertical program
- A public health program
- A new science

Alert countries
to prepare or
prevent for



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IHR: an umbrella for collective learning

Collective learning

- To strengthen in the country internal processes whether or not the event is of international importance.
- Improve flows and processes of "regular" communication between each institution and its counterpart at the Ministry of Health.
- Improve the ability to detect in a timely manner public health events that could have international implications and at the same time improve the response to those events.

Responsible authorities



- **Notification**
- **Reports**
- **Consultation**

Verification 



National IHR Focal Point (one per State Party)

The National IHR Focal Point is the national center designated by each State Party which shall be accessible at all hours for communications with WHO IHR Contact Points under these Regulations

WHO IHR Contact Point (one per region)

The WHO IHR Contact Point is the unit within WHO which shall be accessible at all hours for communications with the National IHR Focal Points



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What is a National IHR Focal Point?

- **One single entry point designated by each country:**
 - Communications with PAHO/WHO and between States Parties.
 - Communication between IHR NFPs: (e.g., contract tracing, coordination of control measures/public health response).
- **The National IHR Focal Point (NFP) will ideally be an office or center, not a single individual.**
- **Annually confirmed. Contact details updated (March 2017).**
- **Each NFP must have the authority (legal or administrative framework) to:**
 - Work with a variety of sectors within the country to coordinate analysis of national public health events and risk.
 - Report events to the WHO on behalf of the country.

Four mandatory functions

1. **Notify WHO of a potential public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) and send urgent IHR related messages.**
2. **Remain accessible at all hours (24/7).**
3. **Disseminate information to relevant national sectors.**
4. **Consolidate input from relevant national sectors.**

What is an National IHR Focal Point?

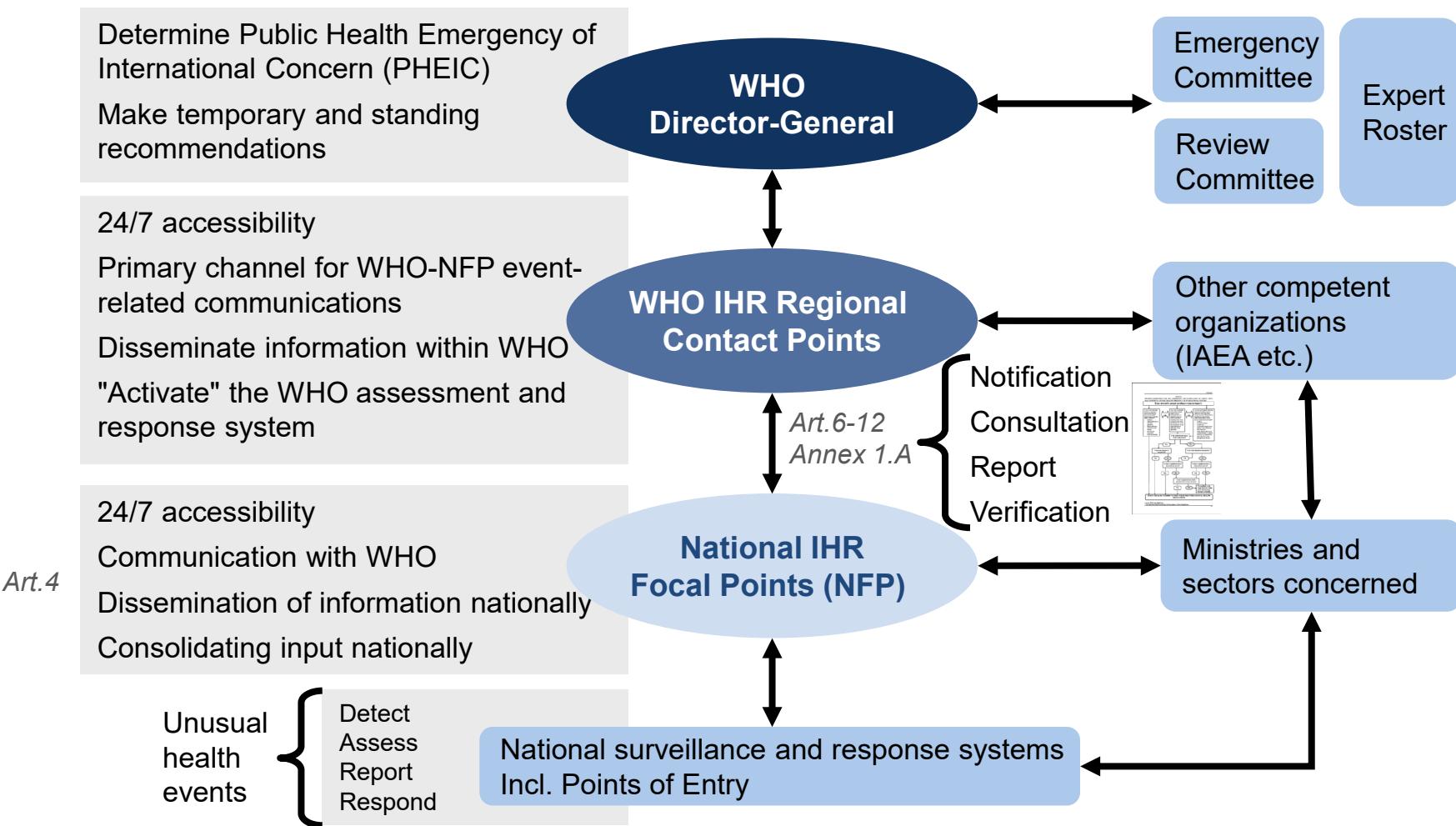
Responsible for notification to WHO but not necessarily responsible for carrying out the assessment.

Event related communication by non IHR NFP - national agencies/institutions to PAHO/WHO

- Initial communication, risk assessment, request for information.
- Involvement of the respective IHR NFP in the communication.

Communication related to events occurring in overseas territories.

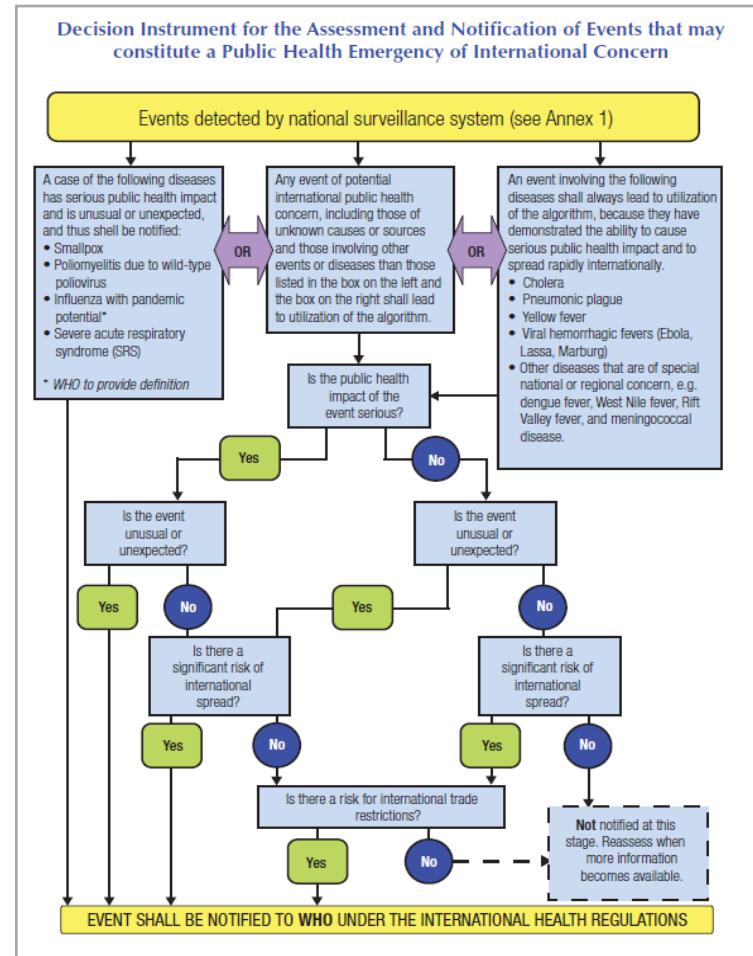
IHR operational framework



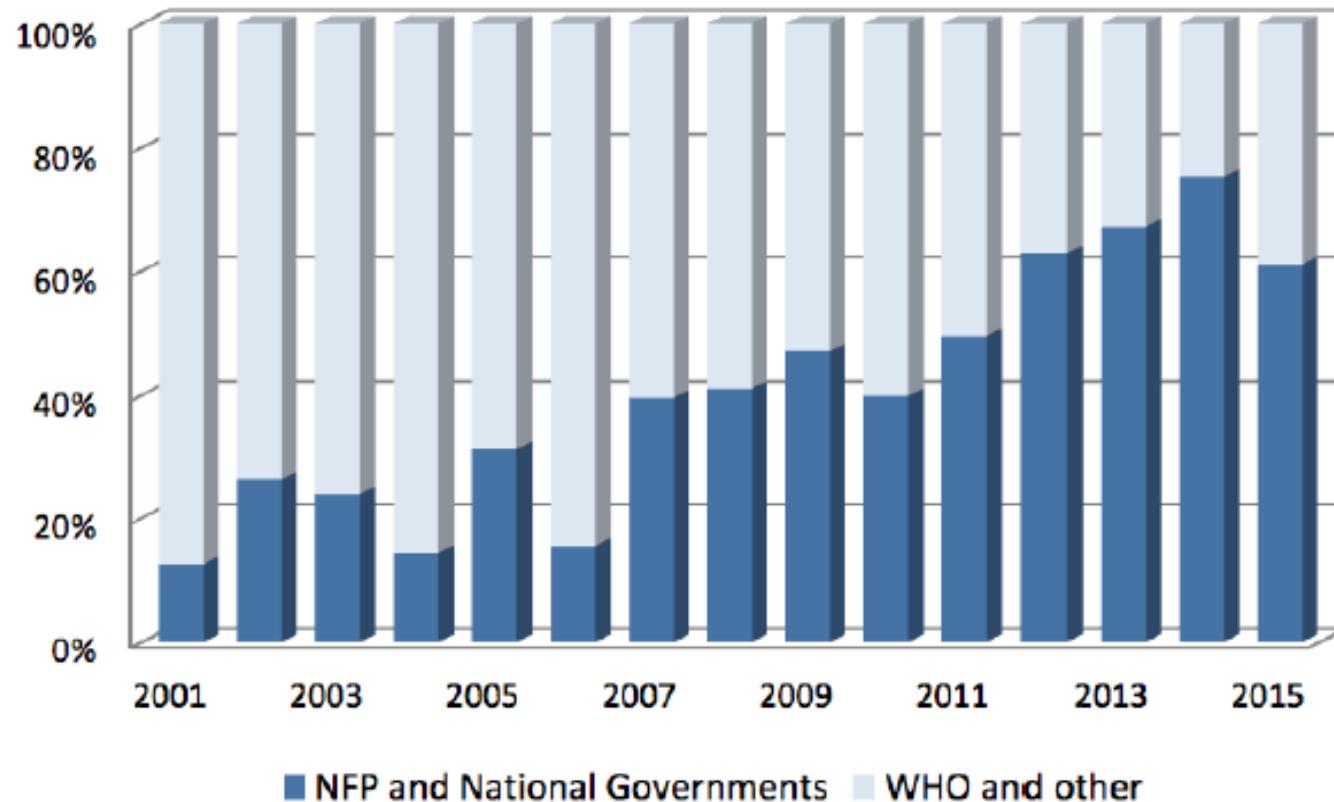
What types of events should be notified under the IHR?

- **Four immediately notifiable conditions:**
 - Smallpox
 - Polio (due to wild-type poliovirus)
 - Human influenza caused by a new subtype
 - SARS
- **Four criteria to decide on notification:**
 - Is the public health impact of the event serious?
 - Is the event unusual or unexpected?
 - Is there any significant risk of international spread?
 - Is there any significant risk of international travel or trade restrictions?

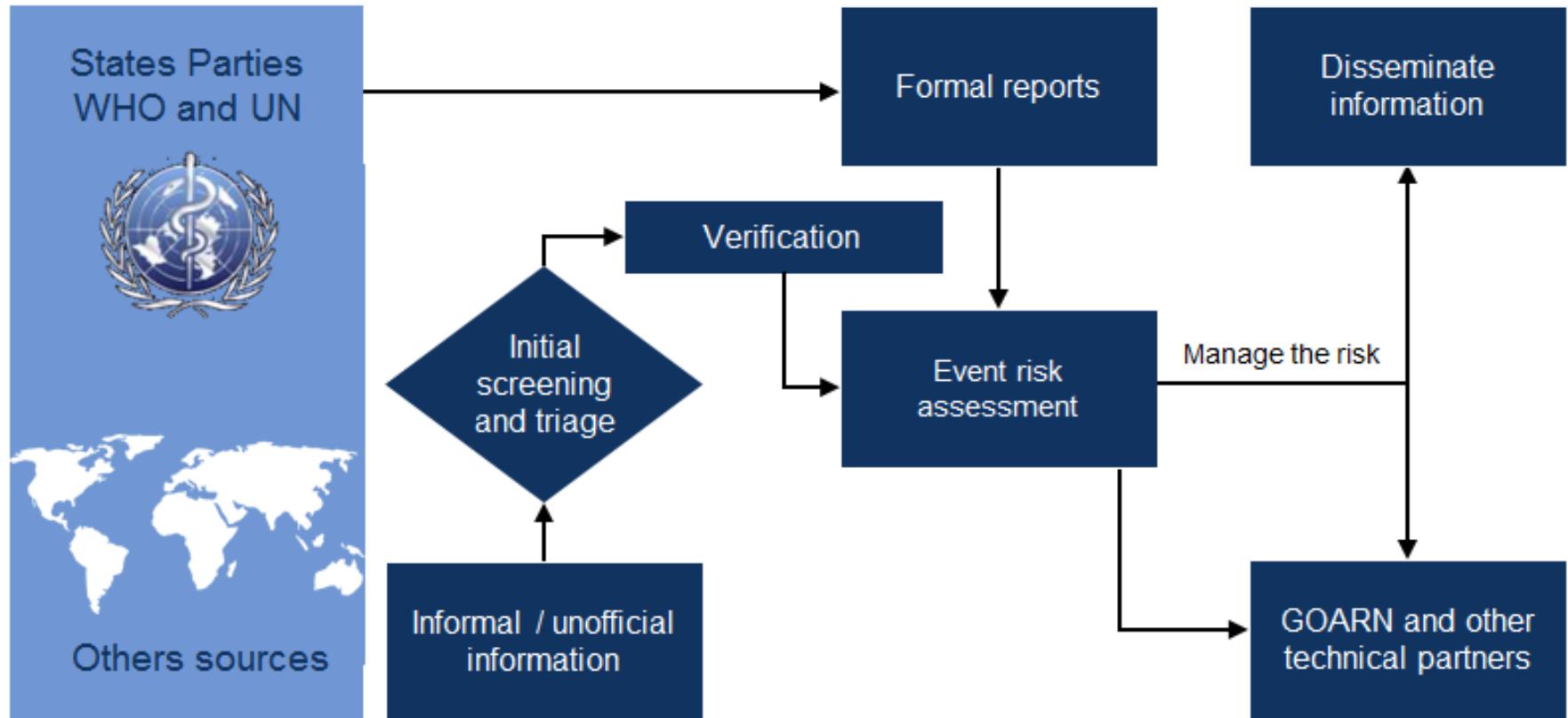
YES to any two (2) or more criteria indicates that notification of the WHO is required



Notification to WHO



Event management steps



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Decision-making for the outcome of the interactions

- **No action**
- **Public health action**
 - Domestic
 - International
- **Information-sharing**
 - Channels of dissemination
 - Confidentiality
 - Relevance of information shared and clarity on purposes and expectations
 - Language
- **Response**

Alert countries to prepare or prevent for



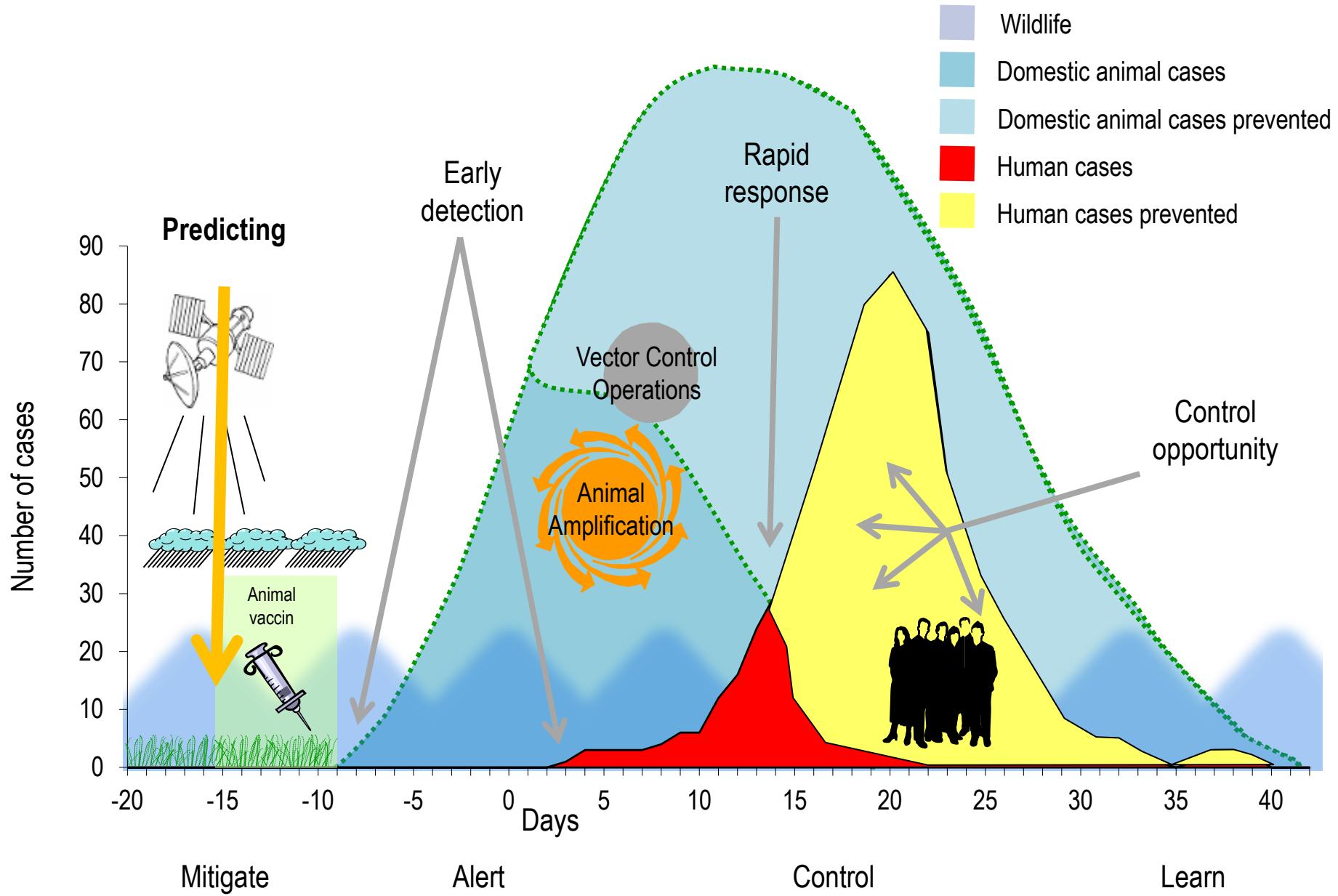
Benefits



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National public health emergency context

- IHR NFP functions as a conduit for information between the national leaders and the global coordinators
- Does not replace existing bilateral and multilateral arrangements
- IHR mechanisms **supplement** national-state bio surveillance capacity
 - Timely notifications of new (potential) events/situations
 - Process for validating rumors or increasing “transparency”
 - Network for sharing best practices and situational updates
 - “Lifeline” for public health disaster resources
- At the borders and shared points / ports of entry (POE), community-to-community communication and coordination remains critical



Benefits

Benefits of using the IHR NFP network include:

- Efficient manner to communicate public health information with other countries
>> easy access to other countries
- Effective and reliable system
- Readily available list of IHR NFPs (no need to keep up to date contact lists of subject matter experts in various countries)
- Opportunity to strengthen information-sharing and collaboration between countries
- Helps to meet IHR's call for the timely and open reporting of public health events for the purpose of global health security

Challenges / questions

- What is the current scope (i.e., the purpose, intended action) of using the IHR channels for measles and rubella notifications?
- Should this channel be used for international contract tracing (need to balance effort, resources, and overall value)?
- What is the minimum information required for public health action to be carried out by other countries?
- What are the suggested timelines for reporting and response?
- What is the overall perceived/intended public health value of the notification? Do other countries find these communications helpful / beneficial?

Summarizing

- The role of the IHR NFP is essentially managing/issuing notifications and serving as the point of contact between the State Party and WHO and other IHR NFPs. It has (should have) the authority to receive and send timely information to WHO on behalf of the country.
- The IHR NFP does not replace or conflict with any body created at the country level to channel information and response between different actors at the country level to organize the internal response.
- An IHR NFP has a core role of international "notification" to WHO, not the responsibility to organize the "response" to an event (international or otherwise) within the country.

Summarizing

- Strengthening the role of the IHR NFP (which is an obligation of countries under the IHR) does not necessarily mean changing processes or responsibilities already in place in the country for information-sharing and response to events.
- The evaluation of the events using Annex 2 is not actually the IHR NFPs responsibility. The responsibility for assessing events under Annex 2 is a requirement of the technical areas in the ministry and government responsible for that event.
- The IHR NFP is involved and can guide or lead such agency or national assessment, but the assessment is a technical activity and should therefore be informed by those units and/or agencies responsible.

Pan American Health Organization / World Health Organization. Multilateral IHR
NFP Strengthening Workshop Toolkit. June. Washington, DC: PAHO/WHO; 2017



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