



Department  
of Health &  
Social Care

*Andrew Stephenson MP  
Minister of State*

*39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU*

15<sup>th</sup> March 2024

Dear Steve,

Following the Secretary of State's letter sent on 10th January 2024, I am writing to update you and the Health and Social Care Committee on the ongoing negotiations at the World Health Organization (WHO) on the Pandemic Accord ("the Accord") and the proposed amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR). There has been one round of each negotiation since the Secretary of State last wrote to you and Member States are still working to conclude negotiations by May 2024.

### **Update on negotiations to agree a new Pandemic Accord**

The UK continues to engage constructively in discussions to agree a new Pandemic Accord, and Member State sovereignty remains paramount throughout negotiations, as outlined by Ministers in previous Parliamentary debates. The UK recognises the benefits a new agreement to the UK could deliver in terms of preventing and responding to future pandemic threats if it contains strong enough provisions on transparency, reporting, and investment in prevention. Our approach continues to be discussed and agreed across HMG to ensure alignment with issues including policies related to trade and animal health.

WHO Member States met for the eighth time, from 19 February to 1 March 2024, to continue negotiations on the Accord. Progress is being made in some areas of the agreement, but substantive differences remain to work through, particularly on proposals for a new system to enable faster sharing of pathogen samples and genetic sequences in the event of a pandemic threat; faster access to vaccines and other pandemic products according to public health need; and financing to enable stronger prevention and a faster global response to pandemics.

Over the last two months, Member States have continued to work on the key elements of the Accord through informal 'sub-groups', which were opportunities to grapple with complex concepts in more depth. The UK continued to co-facilitate the subgroup discussions on proposed text on pandemic prevention and public health surveillance, working with the Vice-Chair to identify paths towards consensus.

A new draft of the Accord, the “Revised Draft of the Negotiating Text”, was circulated to Member States on 8 March 2024, reflecting the most recent round of negotiations. The text is available online [Revised draft of the negotiating text of the WHO Pandemic Agreement](#). This draft has been prepared by the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the negotiations, with support from the WHO Secretariat, and is intended to be used as the basis for the next round of negotiations. It has not been agreed by Member States. WHO Member States will continue negotiations from 18 - 28 March 2024, where the new text will be discussed. The UK is currently analysing the text which contains sections that we will not accept, and we will work to ensure our priorities are addressed in negotiations. Our initial view is that the new text presents some serious challenges, both because its pandemic prevention commitments are – in our view – too weak; and because it continues to contain provisions which are unacceptable to us, for example on intellectual property protections.

No additional negotiations have yet been announced ahead of the May 2024 deadline, although it is almost certain that they will be required to reach a May agreement. There is much to do in advance of the May deadline, but we are committed to working with our international partners to achieve a positive outcome for the UK and globally. G7 Health Ministers, including the Secretary of State, met on 28 February 2024 and released a statement (available [here](#)) underlining the importance and urgency of concluding these negotiations by May 2024, recognising Member States’ sovereignty and responsibility for health systems. In the letter, we set out our common priorities and the importance of collaboration to reach agreements. G20 Ministers also met on 14 March 2024 and agreed the importance of working together to achieve a meaningful May agreement, whilst recognising the challenges that remain.

### **Update on negotiations to agree targeted amendments to the IHR**

Negotiations to agree targeted amendments to the IHR continued during the most recent working group, which took place from 5-9 February. Member States continued the discussions on the Bureau’s proposals, which were based on previous working group meetings. The discussions mainly focused on communications between the WHO and Member States during a public health event; equity provisions; Member States’ core capacities for responding to a public health event; and definitions of pandemic and early action alert. This meeting was resumed on 8 March 2024 to discuss proposals related to access to vaccines and other health products, financing to support IHR implementation, and Member State collaboration.

The UK’s priorities for the IHR continue to be amendments that improve: the timeliness of countries’ sharing of information and responding proportionately to public health events including through a tiered alert system; countries’ implementation of the IHR; and rapid identification of public health events that may cross borders.

Further information can be found here, including the original proposed amendments: [WHO | Working Group on Amendments to the International Health Regulations \(2005\)](#). The latest version of these proposals is not available online and they are still subject to discussion. We expect updated text to be published in advance of any final talks but that is still subject to final agreement. No proposals have been agreed between Member States.

The next IHR negotiations will take place between the 22-26 April 2024. This is the final scheduled meeting before the May 2024 deadline, but as with Accord negotiations more meetings may be arranged if needed.

At both negotiations, and as outlined above, the UK continues to be clear that we would not sign up to any agreement that would cede sovereignty to the WHO in making domestic decisions on national measures concerning public health, for example, domestic immunisation programme rollouts and lockdowns. Respecting the sovereign right of States to adopt, legislate, and implement legislation within their jurisdiction remains a distinct principle in the current draft of the Accord and the drafted amendments to the IHR. There are no proposals in either negotiation that would cede UK sovereignty to the WHO, and we will continue to maintain our stance that we would not agree to any proposal that would have this effect.

I will keep you updated on the progress of these negotiations and will continue to consider how best to keep Parliament updated on them as well. I am copying this letter to the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of State for Development, for their awareness.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Stephenson', written in a cursive style.

**THE RT HON ANDREW STEPHENSON CBE MP  
MINISTER OF STATE**