

# COVID-19: Make it the Last Pandemic

## The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness & Response

In May 2020, the World Health Assembly requested the Director-General of the World Health Organization to initiate an impartial, independent, and comprehensive review of the international health response to COVID-19 and of experiences gained and lessons learned from that, and to make recommendations to improve capacities for the future.

The Director General asked the Rt Hon. Helen Clark, former Prime Minister of New Zealand, and Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of Liberia, to convene an independent panel for this purpose and to report to the World Health Assembly in May 2021. The Panel spent eight months reviewing the evidence on how a disease outbreak became a pandemic, and on global and national responses.

The Panel found that the system as it stands now is clearly unfit to prevent another novel and highly infectious pathogen, which could emerge at any time, from developing into a pandemic and demonstrated that the current system – at both national and international levels – was not adequate to protect people from COVID-19.

The time it took from the reporting of a cluster of cases of pneumonia of unknown origin in mid-late December 2019 to a Public Health Emergency of International Concern being declared was too long. February 2020 was also a lost month when many more countries could have taken steps to contain the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and forestall the global health, social, and economic catastrophe that continues its grip-

The report makes two sets of recommendations. The first set includes immediate actions aimed at ending the COVID-19 pandemic, with a particular emphasis on addressing global inequities. A major focus is a push for greater commitment from high-income countries to increase global access to vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics, and to help strengthen health systems.

The second set of recommendations comprises seven actions directed at preparedness to ensure that a future outbreak does not become a pandemic:

- Pandemic preparedness and response must be elevated to the highest level of political leadership in all countries and globally, with the establishment of a Global Health Threats Council.

- WHO should have more independence, authority, and funding.
- Pandemic preparedness needs investment from now to prevent the next crisis by creating fully functional capabilities at national, regional, and global levels.
- A new agile and rapid surveillance information and alert system is needed.
- A global platform should be built for equitable development and distribution of vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and essential supplies.
- A new mechanism for international financing for pandemic preparedness and response should be created.
- Finally, national pandemic coordinators with a direct line to heads of state or government should be established

To read more, *see*:

1. The main report presenting the Panel's findings and recommendations COVID-19: Make it the Last Pandemic ([theindependentpanel.org](http://theindependentpanel.org))
2. Summary of the report COVID-19: Make it the Last Pandemic — A Summary ([theindependentpanel.org](http://theindependentpanel.org))
3. The companion evidence-based narrative (This describes 13 defining moments which have shaped the course of the pandemic How an outbreak became a pandemic ([theindependentpanel.org](http://theindependentpanel.org)))

There are also Background Documents representing the Panel's in-depth research, including an authoritative chronology of the early response at Main Report & accompanying work - The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response

Readers may also wish to read:

- David R Murdoch, Sue Crengle, Bob Frame, Nigel P French, Patricia C Priest. We have been warned – preparing now to prevent the next pandemic. *New Zealand Medical Journal* 4 June 2021, Vol. 134, No. 1536. [www.nzma.org.nz/journal](http://www.nzma.org.nz/journal)
- David Skegg, Peter Gluckman, Geoffrey Boulton, Heide Hackmann, Salim S Abdool Karim, Peter Piot, Christiane Woopen. Future scenarios for the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Lancet* 27 February 2021, Vol. 397, No. 10276, pp. 777–778. [www.thelancet.com](http://www.thelancet.com)