

WHO's Emergency Committee to review the emerging variants of SARS-CoV-2

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Issues statement to consider the potential use of vaccination and testing certificates for international travel



The sixth meeting of the Emergency Committee (EC) convened by the WHO Director-General under the International Health Regulations (2005) (IHR) regarding the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on Jan 14, 2021.

The EC to review the emerging variants of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19, and to consider the potential use of vaccination and testing certificates for international travel.

On variants, the WHO EC called for a global expansion of genomic sequencing and sharing of data, along with greater scientific collaboration to address critical unknowns.

The committee urged WHO to develop a standardized system for naming new variants that avoids geographical markers, an area WHO has already begun work on.

On vaccines, the committee underlined the need for equitable access through the COVAX Facility as well as technology transfer to increase global production capacities.

The committee strongly encouraged vaccine manufacturers to rapidly provide safety and efficacy data to WHO for emergency use listing. The lack of such data is a barrier to ensuring the timely and equitable supply of vaccines at the global level.

Given that the impact of vaccines in reducing transmission is yet unknown, and the current availability of vaccines is too limited, the committee recommended that countries do not require proof of vaccination from incoming travellers.

The committee advised countries to implement coordinated, evidence-based measures for safe travel and to share with WHO experiences and best practices learned.

This was the sixth meeting of the Emergency Committee on COVID-19. Since the declaration of a PHEIC on 30 January 2020, the Director-General has been reconvening the committee at three-month intervals to review progress.