



FAQ



What is our mission?

The mission of the WHO Lyon Office is to assist countries to strengthen their public health systems so they can better detect, assess, notify and respond to health emergencies. Our focus is on strengthening key capacities for emergency preparedness, readiness and response to epidemics and pandemics, such as laboratory capacities. We achieve this by developing a wide range of resources, tools, learning applications and programmes and technical guidance for ministries of health, public health workers and professionals and other health stakeholders.

What are the main areas of our expertise?

The Lyon Office is a Center of Excellence for strengthening public health laboratories. It has developed and disseminated technical guidelines, tools, best practices and learning programmes to thousands of laboratory professionals working on the front line of the detection of infectious disease outbreaks. These efforts are intensified to ensure that the next threats are detected and controlled at a very early stage, thanks to high quality and well-managed laboratory networks. It has also developed leading expertise in enabling health security in international travel, at points of entry and mass gatherings and developing and designing innovative and interactive learning solutions and training programmes for health professionals working in emergency preparedness, readiness and response.

Where are we located?

The WHO Lyon Office is located in Lyon, France, in the 'Bio-district Lyon-Gerland' — an area in the Metropolis of Lyon with rich expertise in life sciences and health.

When was the Lyon Office set up?

The Lyon Office was established in 2001, following an agreement between WHO and the Office's founding partners — the Government of France, the Metropolis of Lyon ("la Metropole") and the Mérieux Foundation, an independent foundation committed to fighting against infectious diseases impacting developing countries.

Which part of WHO is the Lyon office a part of?

The Lyon Office is part of the WHO Headquarters preparedness division of the WHO Health Emergencies Programme (WHE). Within WHE, the Lyon Office is part of the department of Country Readiness Strengthening (CRS).



Why is 2021 a milestone year for the WHO Lyon Office?

2021 marks twenty years of the Lyon Office's work on strengthening country capacities for epidemic alert and response. Over the past two decades, the Office has developed strong expertise in its core areas of work such as laboratory strengthening. The initial vision of WHO Lyon Office – strengthening country capacity for epidemic alert and response – is more valid than ever before, even after twenty years, as the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted a long-standing under-investment in emergency preparedness and readiness.

What is the history of the WHO Lyon Office?

The Lyon Office has evolved over three broad phases:

- **2001-2005:** The initial years focused on strengthening epidemic alert systems, mainly through capacity building and training in the areas of laboratories and surveillance.
- **2005-2015:** There was an enhancement of the scope of work with an additional focus on points of entry, following the adoption of the revised IHR in 2005. It described new core capacities and requirements, notably around points of entry. Also, new stakeholders were identified for capacity strengthening such as IHR national focal points (NFPs) and rapid response teams (RRTs).
- **Post-2015** and the creation of WHO's Health Emergencies Programme (WHE): With the setting up of the WHE, the scope of work moved from the implementation of the IHR core capacities towards a new emergency preparedness, readiness and response agenda and a renewed focus on laboratory strengthening.



Where do we work?

We have a global mandate, as part of the WHO and its emergencies programme. However, our focus is on strengthening public health systems and capacities in resource-limited countries from all the six regions in which WHO works actively and has a presence. These include Africa, Eastern Mediterranean, South East Asia, Western Pacific, Americas and Europe. While we are not a WHO country office for France or Lyon, our tools or training programmes are at the disposal of national and local counterparts in France.

When do we assist countries (Member States)?

Our capacity building activities are conducted all year long. Whenever an outbreak is detected, we also mobilize to provide support to the emergency response by developing specific technical documents, tools or training programmes in our areas of expertise.

How do we assist countries (Member States)?

The **Public Health Laboratories Strengthening** unit is a Centre of Excellence to prepare laboratory services for health emergencies. It provides technical guidance to countries on management and oversight of laboratory networks. It also helps build the laboratory workforce by developing essential skills, notably in management and leadership. The unit develops tools to assess, monitor and evaluate laboratory capacity and quality assurance. It also supports laboratory preparedness, readiness and response activities for specific hazards before and during public health events.

The **Border Health and Mass Gatherings** unit promotes a risk-based approach to assessing and managing public health threats and enabling health security at mass gatherings, points of entry (airports, ports, ground crossings) and in international travel. It builds capacities of health officials by providing expert advice, tools, technical guidance, training, information and advocacy materials. It also coordinates with key international agencies (ICAO, IATA, IOM, IMO, ILO, CDC) and build collaborative tools and networks to strengthen public health security and guidance for mass gatherings and cross-border movement.

The **Learning Solutions and Training** unit designs learning approaches, tools and materials to assist countries with building effective learning strategies to develop their public health workforce cadres. It develops innovative approaches to help countries identify and evaluate learning needs. It also supports global knowledge networks of health experts and hosts a comprehensive online learning platform on health security. This offers health professionals access to specialised and timely courses, including self-learning modules and a platform to share and collaborate with each other.

What kind of public health challenges and emergencies do we help to address?

Our work focuses on an 'all hazards approach,' which emphasizes an integrated approach to strengthen capacities and capabilities that are critical to preparedness for a full spectrum of emergencies, disasters and diseases.

Increasingly, the 'One Health' approach is an integral part of our work, at the interface of the human-animal-environment health.

What are some of our flagship activities?

Recognising that laboratories effectively play a critical role in the detection, and control of diseases and that laboratory professionals need specialized training in leadership and management, our laboratory strengthening unit has launched the Global Laboratory Leadership Programme (GLLP) - a comprehensive learning package and programme to help build a new generation of laboratory leaders from the human, animal and environmental health sectors.

The Border Health and Mass Gatherings unit has evolved a risk-assessment based approach, guidance, tools and training resources for countries to ensure health security at mass gatherings, points of entry and in international travel. It has also helped build a network of WHO collaborating centres to share best practices and knowledge among key stakeholders on health security for mass gatherings and the opportunity that they present for creating public health infrastructure and legacy in countries.

The learning team has designed and developed Health Emergency Preparedness and IHR Compliance (EPIC), a serious game to test a fictional country's capacity to prepare for and address an emerging outbreak. Developed in 2019, with the goal of providing a safe learning environment and testing of capacities, EPIC version 2 is currently under development, taking the impact of COVID-19 into consideration.

For more information on the activities of the Lyon Office, access unit our annual reports on our website: <https://www.who.int/publications/i?publishingoffices=bba2c92c-4fc0-4095-907f-e90808f4e61e>.

What are some of our noteworthy achievements?

As a Centre of Excellence, the public health laboratory strengthening unit has supported the development of quality-assured laboratory networks at national and international level. It has:

- a. Supported access to proficiency testing schemes to enable laboratories to meet international accreditation standards;
- b. Launched a multi-partner, inter-agency, pioneering global initiative to build laboratory leadership;
- c. Advanced laboratory quality standards and IHR compliance through mentoring, simulation exercises, training and assessment tools, and
- d. guided countries on how to scale up laboratory operations during a health emergency.

The border health and mass gatherings unit has contributed in significant ways in helping countries to enable health security at mass gatherings (Mass gatherings), points of entry (PoE) and in international travel, including by training health officials. The risk-based approach it promotes, provides countries with a systematic, scientific and evidence-based way to assess and manage public health threats at Mass gatherings, PoEs and in travel. Its prism of mass gatherings, as opportunities for creating robust and long-lasting public health legacy in countries, is unique and forward-looking.



It also does vital work on coordinating with international partners and building collaborative tools and networks to disseminate public health guidance at Mass gatherings, PoEs and international travel. The learning solutions unit of the Lyon Office has acquired leading expertise in instructional design and a significant body of innovative and interactive training resources for countries, institutions and public health professionals to support the implementation of the International Health Regulations (IHR, 2005). These are scalable and customisable, based on country needs. It has helped strengthen the capacities of national rapid response team (nRRT) members worldwide through comprehensive RRT training packages for countries and an active global knowledge network to provide ongoing learning and support. The Health Security Learning Platform that it hosts has provided a range of training resources and tools on health security to professionals to learn, build, connect and collaborate. The unit is also the go-to team for other Lyon units to develop training courses and learning tools in specialised health topics and areas of their expertise.

For detailed information on our activities since 2001, access our annual reports on our website: <https://www.who.int/publications/i?publishingoffices=bba2c92c-4fc0-4095-907f-e90808f4e61e>.

How has the Lyon Office contributed to WHO's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

As part of WHO's frontline response to fight the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Lyon Office has mobilized expertise in its core areas to assist countries.

Soon after the pandemic broke out in early 2020, The public health laboratory unit developed and coordinated a COVID-19 laboratory community of practice, which allowed thousands of participants from more than 180 countries to engage on critical issues to fight the pandemic through a series of webinars. Topics ranged from testing strategies and technologies to biosafety requirements. It coordinated the implementation of the largest WHO External Quality Assessment programme ever, providing panels of SARS-CoV-2 viruses to more than 3300 laboratories in 102 countries for the assessment of their molecular testing performance. The unit also supports the work on the diagnostics pillar of Access to COVID-19 Tools-Accelerator - the fastest coordinated global effort to develop tools to fight the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our border health and mass gatherings and learning solutions teams collaborated to develop and issue critical policy papers and technical guidance to countries and online training for public health workers on how to mitigate spread in international travel, tourism, on board aircrafts and ships, and at ground crossings, as well as for health planning and risk management for mass gatherings. The unit also organized a series of global and regional webinars on cross-border risk management and coordinated with relevant partners such as ICAO, UN Crisis Management Team, Global Tourism Crisis Committee, IMO, and ILO.

The learning solutions team, in addition to supporting the training needs of other units, developed and delivered a range of its online learning modules, training packages and webinars on COVID-19 with a focus on the needs of national rapid response teams. It also mobilized its long-standing and well-developed global and regional knowledge networks of national IHR focal points and for national rapid response team members, thus enabling stakeholders and experts, worldwide, to stay connected during the pandemic, gain vital access to the latest WHO technical guidance and share updates and progress on an evolving global epidemiological situation.

Who are our partners?

We work in close collaboration and partnerships with national health agencies, international organizations and non-state actors involved in emergency preparedness and response. They include:

- National or Regional public health agencies with a mandate for disease prevention and control
- Specialized UN agencies (e.g. UNWTO, ICAO, ILO)
- Inter-governmental organizations (e.g. OIE)
- International mechanisms and instruments (e.g. ACI, ICS, European Joint Action Health Gateways, EU CBRN Risk Mitigation Centers of Excellence)
- Regional commissions promoting economic cooperation and integration between countries (e.g. UNECE, UNCECLA)
- Intra-agency task forces (e.g. UN Crisis Management Team on Travel and Trade Task Force)
- Non-governmental organizations and other non-state actors (e.g. academic sector, WHO Collaborating Centers, not-for-profit foundations and philanthropies (e.g. Foundation Mérieux), professional associations (e.g. IATA).

